



For immediate release

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Kansas Completes First Long-Range Medical Drone Delivery

Onaga, KS – Community HealthCare System (CHCS) and Kelly Hills Unmanned Systems have made Kansas history with the state’s first long-range drone delivery of medical supplies.

On Tuesday, August 12, an unmanned aircraft departed Kelly Hills UAS Airfield in Seneca carrying an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) and landed 30 minutes later at Charles E. Grutzmacher Municipal Airport in Onaga. The flight demonstrated how advanced drone technology can help bridge healthcare gaps for rural communities.

The project was part of the Federal Aviation Administration’s Beyond Program, with support from Kansas State University’s Salina Aerospace and Technology Campus, Pyka, and the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT).

“We serve four counties with a critical access hospital, multiple clinics, and long-term care facilities,” said John Fitzthum, CHCS CEO. “This technology could allow us to quickly deliver blood, antivenom, an AED, or other vital supplies between hospitals and from tertiary care centers—resources that can be difficult to get in emergencies.”

“Kelly Hills’ flight today isn’t just another drone test—it’s a glimpse into the future of where aviation connects our communities in ways that were once impossible,” said Travis Balthazor, Kansas State University Salina Aerospace and Technology Campus. “In rural Kansas, where

distances can make the difference in timely access to critical care, the ability to move life-saving supplies by drone is truly a game changer.”

Lukas Koch, CEO of Kelly Hills Unmanned Systems, said, “A new dawn of aviation is upon us. As a Kansas business, we are honored to assist the state in defending its title as ‘Air Capital of the World.’ Drones will surely affect how our key industries like agriculture, healthcare, and manufacturing are managed today. Thanks to great partners like those who helped with this rural medical delivery project, we’ll be able to keep Kansas in the lead.”

The drone used for the flight was a Pyka Pelican 2, the largest ever approved by the FAA in the US, was originally designed by Pyka for agricultural spraying and later modified with a cargo pod to carry medical supplies. Nathan White, Pyka co-founder, explained:

“We designed these aircraft with exactly this kind of use case in mind—connecting rural communities where driving may be costly or time-consuming, or where speed is essential, as in the medical world.”

Brian Kassin from KDOT added:

“Today is the first time we’ve been able to show in Kansas what’s possible for rural healthcare delivery. It’s a perfect example of public and private partners using innovation to create new opportunities for access that never existed before.”

More than 40 people attended the event, including community members, local officials, and aviation industry representatives.

EVENT DETAILS

- Date: Tuesday, August 12, 2025
- Flight Path: Seneca, KS → Onaga, KS (~30 minutes)
- Cargo: Automated External Defibrillator (AED)
- Primary Partners: Community HealthCare System (CHCS) and Kelly Hills Unmanned Systems
- Additional Support: Kansas State University’s Salina Aerospace and Technology Campus, Pyka, Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT)

About Community HealthCare System:

Community HealthCare System is a comprehensive health network committed to enriching the health and lives of the people we serve in Northeast Kansas. With a focus on compassion,

community, and quality care, CHCS provides services across multiple clinics, facilities, and programs

About Kelly Hills Unmanned Systems

Kelly Hills is a Kelly, KS based advanced drone technology business that leverages a combination of exclusive Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) programs, State partnerships, and exciting new unmanned aerial system (UAS) platforms to inspire and develop new tools for critical industries such as agriculture, public safety, and healthcare right here in rural America.

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