

## Itsy-bitsy, teeny-weeny yellow camera-toting copter

(<http://www.suntimes.com/classifieds/homes/homelife/121882.HOF-News-helio03.article>)

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It's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it.

Mark Segal flies the friendly skies -- of virtual skylscapes -- with his remote control mini-helicopter.

Sales centers and Web sites that feature 360 degree photos and videos from the top floors of buildings that don't exist yet are likely using panoramic photographs taken by Mark Segal, president of SkyPan International, 711 N. Milwaukee Ave.

Since 9/11, most cities won't allow low-flying, full-size helicopters to take aerial photographs, so Segal landed the job of flying the mini-helicopters by remote control.

"We have custom-made, miniature helicopters," Segal explained. "They are nothing like the ones for the amateur weekend flyers. They are built to carry some weight -- about an 11-pound payload. The helicopter weights from 20 to 30 pounds depending on which one we are using."

Powered by gasoline or by electricity, the flying machines are about 2-feet high and 5-feet long.

"The full electric one is really cool and extremely quiet," he said. "It's our stealth unit. We use it when noise is a problem."

The flying cameras are used only over private property, such as an empty lot or an existing low-rise building that will be torn down for a high-rise, he said. The camera uses film rather than digital technology because it is of a higher quality and because frequently the photos are blown up to the size of wall murals to simulate the views outside of a model condo window or to cover a sales center wall.

Yes, Segal enjoys his job. This year, he's traveled to 15 different cities. No, you probably cannot afford to buy a helicopter just like his for whatever uses you had in mind.

"People ask us all the time about the cost," he said. "You are talking over \$50,000 easily and some of them cost more because of the electronics. We have autostabilizer systems: it will stabilize at 200 to 300 feet."

Some photographers use blimps or balloons to suspend their cameras, but Segal said a tethered gas bag is harder to control and keep steady over a single property.

In addition to condominium developers, SkyPan International also does work for commercial building developers for presentations to potential tenants. He chooses not to do surveillance work for the government or jobs that involve flying over public streets, sidewalks or other property, he said.

SkyPan services start in the \$10,000 to \$12,000 range depending on the size of the potential building and the location of the site. They've done dozens of Chicago high-rise sites for clients including American Invsco, Belgravia Group, Elysian Hotels, Enterprise Companies, Fifield Companies, Four Seasons Residences, Gammonley Group, Hines Development, MCL Companies, Jameson Realty and John Buck Co.

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