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Mike Holthouse scopes our town from above: My Cleveland


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 **By Grant Segall**


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MEDINA, Ohio -- Mike Holthouse knows Ohio from the muck to the skies.

He grew up washing Celeryville's famous black soil from its lettuce. Holthouse, now 40, flies anywhere from 300 to 5,000 feet high to photograph the region for [Above All-Ohio](#).

How does Cleveland look from up there?

I like the buildings downtown. The Terminal Tower's my favorite. It's a symbol of the city. It's instantly recognizable.

I like Severance Hall and First Christ Scientist on the hill. They were designed by the same architect [Walker and Weeks].

How's the lake look?



Scott Shaw, The Plain Dealer

Mike Holthouse takes to the skies so the rest of the world can appreciate Cleveland's beauty from above.

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I'll follow a ship or circle it to see the wake or the ice bobbing. The lighthouse downtown was covered in ice last year.

How's the countryside look?

I like the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. I'm always taking pictures of that bridge with all the arches.

Oh, for I-271. Other country shots?

Every time I see a corn maze, I take a picture. A lot of the Amish farms stack the cornstalks; from the air, the patterns are pretty cool. Farmers also smash their pumpkins after Halloween.

What do people pay you to shoot?

Mostly commercial real estate and construction projects. Some people's farms and homes. We shot the Ahuja hospital and the UH Cancer Center. We do infrared shots; you can find moisture in roofs. We pick up stock shots along the way for The PD and anyone who wants them.

Is our weather a challenge?

There've been times when we've woken up and the forecast has completely changed. My wife, Chris, keeps on top of it. She runs the business and edits the pictures. She used to work for the National Weather Service. She hates when people blame the Weather Service for the weather.

Cleveland's actually windier than the Windy City. Does the wind keep you on the ground sometimes?

I flew one time with a wind advisory because I had to get a job done. Coming in for a landing, I looked out my side window and saw the runway. I'm not doing that again.

Do our clouds mess up the pictures?

I like interesting skies. For skyline shots, a bright, sunny day is good. For the artsy shots, you really need the right clouds. I like the high, thin clouds that don't cast shadows. The low, puffy clouds make shadows that look like inkblots.

This year's been terrible for weather. We've had two weeks straight here you couldn't do anything.

How's lake effect look from above?

It can be clear down here in Medina, but sometimes I can't shoot in Cleveland. Other times, I've taken photos in Cleveland and tried to go east to Concord or Painesville, and forget it.

In the spring, when the water's still cold, you can see the clouds form the perfect shape of the shoreline.

There's more haze in the summer, but the lake really helps. All the wind off the lake pushes everything out.

Do our 41 degrees of latitude matter?

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In the winter, even at high noon, you have long shadows. We try to fly at high noon, plus or minus two hours.

Do our many trees get in the way?

People say, 'I want a picture of my house,' and it's hidden by trees. On the other hand, when the leaves fall, it's not as pretty.

Do our many birds get in the way?

They're only a factor on landing and taking off. Occasionally, you'll get a hawk up high. The first time I saw a bald eagle, I thought, "Wow, that's unusual." Now it's three times a year. It's still cool. I saw one 2,000 feet above the ground. I've seen their nests near Toledo.

Does Ohio let pilots fly and click?

It's much safer than driving and talking on the cellphone. You take your hands off the wheel for two seconds; get three shots. I own a plane. For low shots, I rent a helicopter and a pilot.

What's Celeryville like?

It's about 55 miles west of Medina. The three main families came from the Netherlands. They don't grow celery anymore. A lot of radishes, lettuces, turnips, gourds. . . .

Last fall, they had a big fire. (A previous version of this story wrongly said why Celeryville's region is called the Firelands. Land was given to people from parts of Connecticut burned during the Revolutionary War. See firelandsmuseum.org/History.) I helped rebuild and took a lot of construction pictures.

After trying Arizona and Indiana, why'd you settle in Medina?

When we had kids, we wanted to be close to the grandparents. Chris is from Parma. And, if we were in Cleveland, half our flight radius would be over the lake.

Where do you take visitors?

We usually end up at Medina Hardware, off the square. They've got housewares in the basement -- everything you can imagine. They have popover trays like my mother used to have. I got an Indy-car cookie-cutter.

How's the square look from above?

It's real obvious that it's the center of town. The buildings around it all face it, and all roads lead to it. I try to shoot it every season, with the different light.

Where do you grab a bite?

I'm a meat-and-potatoes and pizza kind of guy. Romeo's is good. The Main Street Cafe has really good burgers. Sully's has a meat loaf sandwich.

What do you do for fun?

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Medina has some good walking parks. We did a geocaching series.

We always go to the square here. The kids like the ice sculptures and the chalking.

We go to both zoos, Akron and Cleveland. We used to go to the Cleveland auto races. We go to Mid-Ohio races.

We go to Cleveland for the fireworks at Christmas and shopping at Tower City. We go to the air show.

Like living here?

Cleveland's a great town. You've got world-class hospitals. You've got the lake. You've got a national park. You've got the Cleveland Orchestra. You've got three major sports teams, some better than others.

Favorite athletes?

Bernie Kosar was the face of the Browns. He made an appearance in my little hometown 30 years ago. Everybody got plastic footballs with his signature.

I like Bobby Rahal. He was born in Medina. He's a businessman. He has a degree in history. When stuff happened on the track, he wouldn't bash other drivers. He'd say, "Well, we both were at fault." He put it behind him and went on.

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