

Nine graduates ready for the sky

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REGIONAL Express's investment in its pilot training scheme is paying dividends and could grow into a new arm for the business.

Nine men graduated at Wagga Airport in front of proud family members and friends yesterday to take the number of Regional Express (Rex) graduates beyond 60.

Rex executive chairman Lim Kim Hai is based in Singapore but was in Australia for the company's annual financial announcements.

He made time to fly to Wagga to attend his first cadet graduation ceremony.

Graduate pilot Chase Antonovic exceeded all expectations.

He received both the Max Hazelton Award for his flying achievements and the Don Kendell Award for the highest scores in his theory exams.

Network manager for Rex

Warrick Lodge said the program was going from strength to strength.

The pilot training academy, currently under construction opposite Wagga Airport's terminal, was on track for a January opening, he said.

"It will more than satisfy our own purposes. It is important for us to protect our pilot numbers but it's also a business strategy in that we want to branch out to train pilots for other airlines as well," Mr Lodge said.

Diversification could be key to Rex's future with the economic climate being blamed for a 5.6 per cent fall in net profit after tax of \$23 million for the end of financial year.

Low passenger numbers is the main reason, according to managing director Jim Davis.

"The economic climate has seen most profitable airlines in the world report losses. Our results are very satisfactory by comparison," he said.



HIGH ACHIEVER: Chase Antonovic graduated with two awards from the Regional Express cadet pilot training scheme in Wagga yesterday. Picture: Les Smith