



Runway success: Wagner's vision takes flight

Meet John Wagner

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When talking about remarkable business achievements, surely funding and building your own privately funded greenfield commercial airport would have to rank as one of the most audacious of them all.

But to top that achievement with building your own \$40 million bulk freight port, well that is what sets the Wagner brothers apart and puts them in a class of their own.

“(Our port) will be completed towards the end of next year and it’s another piece of infrastructure that we can capitalise on and add to our business,” said family spokesperson John Wagner.

“We import a lot of products into our own business and we want to be able to not only do our own product but do other people’s products as well,” the Toowoomba local said.

The airport has been fully operational since November 2014 and three airlines now fly in and out of the inland town – Qantas (flying direct to Sydney), Rex (flying to Mount Isa) and AirNorth (flying direct to Melbourne and Cairns).

“It took 19 months and 11 days,” John Wagner said. “There were very few surprises; it was exactly what we thought it would be like (to build an airport),” he said.

The Brisbane West Wellcamp airport was built to service the Wagners’ fledgling business park at Wellcamp.

“We were getting questions from potential tenants, global companies, about why would we want to invest in

Toowoomba when there’s no connectivity, no airport,” John Wagner told the REIQ Journal.

There was an airport, but the problem was that it was little more than a potted bitumen strip that could only receive small, 30-passenger light aircraft.

“Toowoomba is the second largest inland city in Australia (after Canberra) and we get 1.3 million tourists every year, so it needed an airport,” he said.

The stroke of genius, among many, seems to be the decision to eschew government involvement.

“If we had asked for government assistance we would have needed report after report and reports on those reports and we would still be talking about it,” Mr Wagner said.

“So we opted to not ask for government assistance and to just get on and do the job ourselves. In hindsight, it was definitely the best way to go,” he said. Even though it cost about \$200 million.

Other obstacles included complications with nearby defence force-controlled airspace via Oakey and Amberley air force bases. And the media was filled with sceptical reports that doubted a large-scale privately funded commercial airport could be built a) on time, b) at all.

The Wagners weathered some heated public opinion.

“Yes, we were aware of it all, but we

remained true to our vision. We had total conviction in what we were doing because we saw it was the right thing for our region and right the thing for Australia.

“And that has proved very much to be the case,” he said.

The first public flights began in November 2014. The airport is the first new airport to be built in Australia in more than 44 years. It is ideally located beside the Second Range Crossing, and also near the proposed inland rail corridor, creating the nexus for a major transport hub to service the growing freight market.

“(Our business) is a generational asset; it’s a 40-50 year project to complete the business park, which is about 500 hectares (which is about 500 Suncorp Stadiums),” Mr Wagner said.

“We’re proud of (what we’ve done) and what I didn’t understand (at the start) was that when we committed to the investment it gave people in our region confidence to further invest in their own businesses,” he said.

“It’s been an incredible shot in the arm for our region and we’re really, really proud of that,” he said.

John Wagner will take the main stage at the REIQ Summit on October 6 to share his insights – how to spot big ideas, how to overcome challenges and how to stick to your vision when all around you are voicing doubts. Don’t miss out on seeing this legendary businessman live – get your tickets today at REIQSummit.com.au.