



Local flight school wants to train Chinese commercial pilots

Web Posted: 09/07/2006 08:05 PM CDT

Meena Thiruvengadam
Express-News Business Writer

A well-known San Antonio flight school is working to strike a deal with the Chinese government that would certify it to train commercial pilots from mainland China.

The certification would let Wright Flyers Aviation, one of the country's largest flight schools, train pilots for such airlines as Air China at a time when China's commercial aviation sector is growing more quickly than the country can train pilots.

Blake Hastings, executive director of Free Trade Alliance San Antonio, describes the certification as a "Chinese government seal of approval."

It would make Wright Flyers one of a handful of U.S. flight schools approved to train Chinese commercial pilots, company President Rand Goldstein said.

Representatives of the Civil Aviation Administration of China, the government agency that oversees all civil aviation there, visited San Antonio this week to inspect Wright Flyers' training methods, equipment and records. The inspection is among the final steps in a process Goldstein began a year ago.

"We believe that within two weeks we will actually be a certified Chinese pilot training center," he said. "This will create an opportunity for us to potentially double our business in a very short period of time."



(Nicole Fruge'/Express-News)

Wright Flyers Aviation, one of the country's largest flight schools, hopes to become one of a handful of American institutions certified to train pilots for China's fast-growing aviation market.

- [Wright Flyers Aviation](#)
- [General Administration of Civil Aviation of China](#)

Wright Flyers trains several hundred career and recreational flight enthusiasts each year. The total cost for its commercial pilot certification program is about \$17,000.

Chinese pilots training with Wright Flyers would need to obtain full-time student visas, similar to those needed by students studying at American colleges and universities. All international flight students also must submit to Transportation Security Administration screening, which includes fingerprints, photos and a background check.

China isn't the only country whose pilot students are seeking training from his school, but Goldstein said it's often easier for Chinese to obtain visas, making the country an especially lucrative market.

"Doubling our business should really be just the beginning," he said. "The market in China has a great deal more potential for us."

Commercial air traffic in China is expected to rise between 15 and 20 percent each year leading up to the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, said Usha Haley, director of the Global Business Center at the University of New Haven in Connecticut and co-author of the "Chinese Tao of Business."

Budget airlines are experiencing the strongest growth in China, she said, with the number of flights jumping from 48 in 2005 to more than 2,000 this year.

"The overall projection for this industry is favorable because disposable incomes are rising, there is more business travel in China, and the Olympics are coming up," Haley said. "And every 1 percent growth in passenger travel means the need for at least 150 new aircraft."

And it means an increased need for trained commercial air pilots.

Goldstein said one Chinese airline has already committed its business to his school pending government certification.

meenat@express-news.net

Online at: <http://www.mysanantonio.com/business/stories/MYSA090806.01C.BIZchina.pilots.27b79df.html>