



South West Minister Mark McGowan and inaugural patron Dr Ern Manea proudly support the South West Academy of Sport concept at Friday's launch. PICTURE: DEREK POOL

# Funding kicks off academy program

By STEVE TUOHEY

THE South West Academy of Sport made its debut on Friday, with South West Minister Mark McGowan kicking off the sponsorship drive with a \$100,000 cheque from the State Government.

The new SWAS program, which is expected to be up and running next year, will be a first for regional WA and offer local athletes the opportunity to enter elite training without leaving home.

It will be based at Bunbury's South West Sports Centre but

offer training throughout the region, with up to four sports and a number of individual scholarships to be included in the first intake.

The Academy will also act as a feeder for the WA Institute of Sport and Australian Institute of Sport.

Mr McGowan encouraged businesses to financially support the Academy and help with ongoing costs.

"SWAS will play an important role in the South West and I hope those enjoying the economic benefits of the region will

support it through sponsorship," he said.

"The benefits to business, apart from boosting regional sport and development of champions, will be the recognised partnership with sporting achievement and excellence in the region."

Former Bunbury Mayor and South West sporting identity Dr Ern Manea was introduced as the inaugural SWAS patron at Friday's launch and also encouraged the community to support the concept mooted by past Chamber of Commerce and In-

dustry chairman Rolf Stene and developed by the late Wally Foreman.

Former Olympic gymnast Allana Slater also attended the event and shared some of her stories about travelling to training as a young athlete.

"I learnt to read, write and eat in the car and you don't realise what an impact all of the travel has on a family," she said.

"I think it will be great for South West athletes to have something local and allow them to put more focus into achieving their goals."