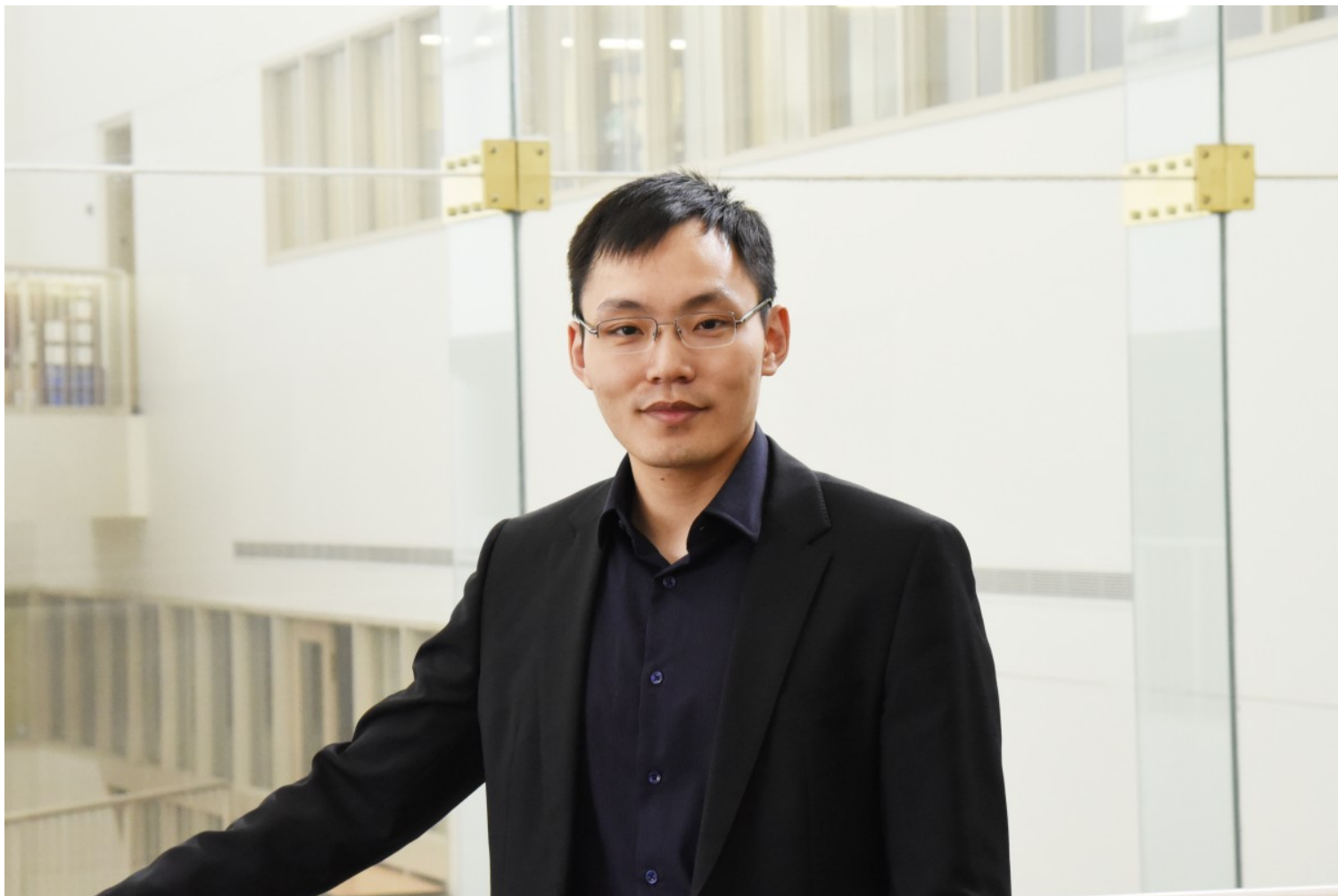


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Shane Li [MBA/15]

Asper grad forges ahead

February 1, 2017 — Shane Li [MBA/15] knows a thing or two about creating opportunities.

When the Asper MBA graduate heard that North Forge Technology Exchange was looking to expand its operations from Winnipeg into rural Manitoba, he wasted no time reaching out to them. As an economic development officer working for the Local Government District of Pinawa, he saw that a partnership with North Forge, an innovative economic development agency, was

just the kind of boost his community needed.

“Pinawa is home to the Whiteshell Laboratories, which were set up 50 years ago by Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd.,” he explains. “The nuclear labs are now being decommissioned. They used to provide 1,000 jobs. Now they provide 350. Our need to diversify the local economy is real, and urgent.”

With the laboratory on board as primary sponsor, Li contacted North Forge and proposed they work together. Last November, North Forge launched its first satellite office, North Forge East, in Pinawa — with Li at the helm as president.

North Forge’s Winnipeg office has already helped more than 60 companies access over \$180 million in financing. Located in the heart of Innovation Alley — Western Canada’s largest business incubator — it’s also home to Canada’s largest non-profit fabrication lab.

North Forge East extends the agency’s reach not only into Pinawa, but across eastern Manitoba. “We’re marketing ourselves to entrepreneurs in Selkirk and Steinbach,” says Li. “We cover the whole Eastman Region, including Lac Du Bonnet, Beausejour, Grand Beach, Anola, Dugald, Oakbank, Sagkeeng First Nation, Powerview-Pine Falls.” North Forge will open a second satellite office in Brandon later this year.



“DARE TO DO” is the motto of North Forge East and its new president

Li has launched a few startups of his own and has worked in business development for a variety of industries. He knows all too well the challenges new ventures face at every stage of their journey. “One of the hardest things about building a business is lack of access to information and resources.”

To bridge that gap, North Forge East provides entrepreneurs in eastern Manitoba with access to mentors and training, work and meeting space, video conferencing equipment, grants, investor and market intelligence, and networking opportunities. The company also invested in cloud infrastructure and software licenses to link up entrepreneurs with design software and 3D printers at the Winnipeg Fabrication Lab, where they can build prototypes remotely.

So far, says Li, the response to North Forge East has been tremendous. “We had four applicants in the first month alone, including a social media firm and a snow removal technology

manufacturer, all looking to develop their products.”

Li says the next steps for North Forge East include exploring ways to meet the challenge of marketing to small communities scattered across a vast geographic distance. “Then, we need to find ways to hook them into the resources available — either by bringing the resources to the entrepreneurs, or vice versa.”

Li credits his MBA with showing him how to put strategic thinking to work solving complex problems. “The program provides you with the tools and skills to handle challenges from different business perspectives, such as marketing, finance and supply chain management,” he says. “The negotiation courses were also useful. They taught me how to broker a deal and find mutual benefit or interest — one of the keys to building great partnerships.” He’s now working on a Master of Science in Business of Administration at Asper. His research focuses — not surprisingly — on entrepreneurship.

“My MBA and my career and my research are already feeding into each other. During my time with the Pinawa local government, I saw opportunities to drive economic growth in the region. My MBA showed me strategies for helping to attract local entrepreneurs and develop their businesses. And now my MSc is helping me to see ways we can create, legalize, commercialize and institutionalize new industries and business opportunities. It’s all working together — and there are many more opportunities out there.”

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