A unique, community-based UVic partnership program is helping prospective Aboriginal entrepreneurs to make the most of economic development opportunities opening up to them in Northern BC.

The Northwest Aboriginal Canadian Entrepreneurs (NW-ACE) is a shared initiative between UVic’s Gustavson School of Business and the Tribal Resources Investment Corporation (TRICORP), which offers financial services to native business owners in the Northwest.

Dr. Brent Mainprize, NW-ACE program director from the Gustavson School of Business, says working on this program has been an honour because it aims to instil and encourage an entrepreneurial mindset.

NW-ACE’s program launched in May and its second cohort started classes this October. The 18-week program is rigorous, however, TRICORP CEO Frank Parnell says that’s a big reason why he’s wanted to bring this program north. “It’s not a watered-down program,” explains Parnell. “The part that sold me [on the program] was the professional instructors involved.”

Parnell says he’s confident as word gets out that future participants will be excited by what the program has to offer.

He strongly believes mentors should be people from the area and as NW-ACE progresses he wants to see a clear understanding between the participating mentors and the mentorship program at Gustavson.

Participant Geri Rothwell, who has lived most of her adult life in Prince Rupert, says she was “thrilled beyond belief” to be part of the first cohort of NW-ACE. “I’ve learned so much and it’s so exciting.”

Empowering Aboriginal Entrepreneurs
by Moira Dann

Photo: UVic Photo Services

Frank Parnell and Brent Mainprize