Jeremy Saimoto, a third-year BCom student from Smithers, BC, returned to his hometown last summer for an unconventional summer co-op work term: sales coordinator with Tiny Life Supply, an online store dedicated to supporting the growing tiny house movement worldwide.

The company, primarily a shipping and logistics business, sources sustainable products from around the world to its online store, helping provide specialized building materials to customers in the tiny house industry.

Saimoto’s co-op placement has given him the opportunity to operate large parts of Tiny Life Supply’s day-to-day business. “A normal workday for me can include anything—reaching out to new suppliers, tracking orders, talking to customers, building the website,” Saimoto explains. Yet he enjoys the challenge of working for a young and vibrant start-up. “I love to have different problems to solve everyday.”

Tiny Life Supply was founded in 2016, by friends Axel Whalen and Jake Daly, and was originally intended to be a personal tiny-house building project. “They were building tiny homes in the hopes of creating a small commune, but they were having trouble sourcing most of the materials during the building process,” Saimoto says. Hoping to make tiny living more accessible, Whalen and Daly partnered to create Tiny Life Supply. The company has now evolved into a global online retailer and tiny-living resource hub.

Saimoto didn’t know much about the tiny house movement before he started his job. “The movement is actually huge—it’s just taking off right now, but the basic principle is ‘you can live the same life with less,’” Saimoto says. The movement’s ethos is centred around sustainable living and recognizing the effect humans are having on the environment. “Lots of people are choosing tiny houses in order to scale back and have a smaller impact on the planet.”

As their eponymous name suggests, tiny houses are in fact tiny. Generally between 200-400 square feet in total, they can be found both on and off wheels. To some, these houses serve as a summer residence, but for a growing number of people tiny houses are becoming primary homes.

“Vancouver has had three or four new builders pop up because it’s becoming so expensive to live there, and so people unable to afford a traditionally sized house are looking at alternatives. Being able to buy a tiny home for under $50,000 and owning it straight out is an attractive alternative.”

Yet the tiny house movement still has obstacles in its way. “Right now local legislation is holding it back,” Saimoto says, citing bylaws in cities like Vancouver that prohibit people from living in what the city considers RVs. “They won’t let you park anywhere, and generally we don’t meet the size requirements for a house. But once we cross that barrier and legislation changes, the movement is likely to explode.”

Saimoto shares the owners’ vision of a new way of doing business. “What makes these guys smile is seeing the tiny house movement grow,” he says. “It’s not just about financial success; their goal is for their business to make a difference in the world. If that means we lower our prices, lower our profit margins but make more people tiny homes—then that’s what we’re going to do.”