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**YULETIDE
CHEERS!**

*Historical beer
tour in
Old City.
BizBites.*

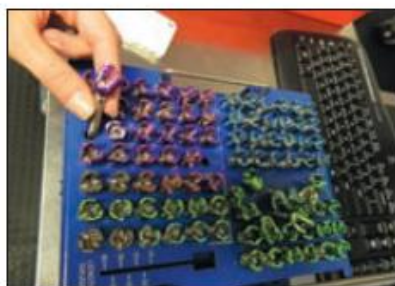
P6



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THIS WEEK



Acero Precision makes precision parts for medical devices.

Manufactured expansion

Parts maker Acero wants to add 30 to 40 jobs

JOHN GEORGE
STAFF WRITER

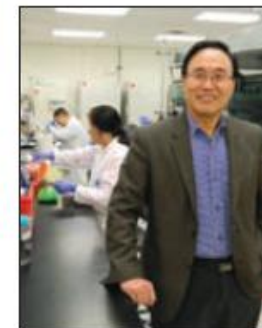
NEWTOWN SQUARE —
Acero Precision is not only getting ready for a move that will

nearly triple its manufacturing and office space, the Delaware County manufacturing company would also like to expand its 85-person staff.

Mike Fitzgerald, the compa-

ny's founder and CEO, said he'd like to add another 30 to 40 people — provided he can find qualified people to hire.

SEE **ACERO**, P34



Frontage Labs

Song Li chased and caught the American Dream.

P3

Brisk sales



Brand Madness

Favorite brands
competition getting down

Frontage Labs' Li wins 'American Dream' award

JOHN GEORGE
STAFF WRITER

EXTON — Ten years ago, Song Li, who was born and raised in a remote Chinese village, founded Frontage Laboratories with seed money pooled from friends and colleagues

Today, his contract research organization employs 170 people in Chester County and another 105 people overseas. Frontage, which conducts clinical testing of new drug candidates for more than 100 life sciences companies, expects annual revenue of more than \$29 million this year.

Next week, Li is being honored as the first recipient of the "Realizing the American Dream" award by the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, a nonprofit economic-development organization that connects immigrants, employers and communities across the region.

Since 2003, the center has helped more than 8,000 immigrants from 140 countries worldwide in a variety of ways that include assistance in starting a business, getting their kids enrolled in school, and opening a bank account. The Welcoming Center has also placed more than 1,100 work-authorized immigrants in jobs.

The "Realizing the American Dream" award was created by the Philadelphia organization to recognize successful immigrant business leaders who have made a significant contribution to the Philadelphia-area economy.

Other entrepreneurs named as finalists for the inaugural award were Zikria Syed, founder and CEO of King of Prussia-based NextDocs Inc., and R. Sukumar, president

'Dr. Li met all of the criteria and then some.'

Anne O'Callaghan
Welcoming Center



Song Li's research organization has 170 employees in Exton, 150 overseas.

and CEO of Optimal Strategic Group in Newtown.

"Dr. Li's achievements are extraordinary," said Anne O'Callaghan, president and CEO of the Welcoming Center. "In just 10 years, his company has grown from infancy to a multimillion-dollar enterprise."

O'Callaghan, a physical therapist who came to the United States from Ireland in 1970, said the organization conducted a rigorous review process to choose a winner from 20 candidates for the honor. All of the candidates, she said, lead businesses that have created jobs and helped the region's economy grow.

"We wanted to be certain we were choosing somebody who epitomized the immigrant story and has been successful for a long period of time — and not a flash in the pan," she said. "Dr. Li met all of the criteria and then some. Everybody who interviewed him fell in love with him. He's built a company that has created more than 250

well-paying jobs. Some people are quick to tell you all the wonderful things they've done, but he credits everyone who has helped him."

Li, 54, was the first person in his hometown district of about 100,000 residents to graduate college.

"I was very lucky; I grew up in a very rural area," Li said. "I had no phone, no TV, no radio when I was a kid." He said he learned about the outside world from reading a few journals laying around his house.

He credits his father — a farmer turned accountant — with urging him to attend college, at Zhengzhou University, where he did so well he was hired to teach chemistry after graduating. After five years as an assistant professor, Li wanted to further his education and advance his career — which meant leaving China. He eventually received a doctorate degree from McGill University in Montreal, then began working in the pharmaceutical industry in Can-

ada. He moved to the United States in 1993, and worked in research and management positions at Great Valley Pharmaceuticals and Wyeth Pharmaceuticals.

At Wyeth, Li was the guy other researchers went to when they needed help solving technical issues with drug studies. When his colleagues left to work for other companies, they'd still call on Li for help.

"People started telling me I should quit my job and do consulting and they would hire me," Li said.

He did just that in 2001 and started developing a client base. Soon, his former colleagues were suggesting he start his own lab and do contract research work. His reply was if he had the money he would. The next year, some of those same friends and former colleagues raised \$100,000 for the venture. Li put in about \$40,000 of his own money and Frontage was born.

The company has expanded in size, revenues and staff over the years as its client base grew primarily through word-of-mouth. Li said it is only within the past year, in response to increased competition in the local CRO market, that the company started its own external marketing department.

Details are key. "People don't like to take care of the details," he said. "They say, 'I'll go to Wall Street and get funding to start a company.' They like to do the big things, but they forget about the small things."

Li noted that over the past decade, Frontage has invested more than \$20 million in new equipment, new facilities, laboratory automation, employee training programs and quality systems. Seventy-five per cent of his staff have earned master's or doctorate degrees.

The company culture, Li said, emphasizes "accountability, continuous improvement and caring." He strives to create a family environment at Frontage, he said, which has employees from more than a dozen countries around the world.