

LIVING LEGENDS

Reaching New Heights





“...an effective hybrid framing process that significantly reduces delivery time while also increasing onsite safety.”

An interview with Jesse D'aoust

Owner

Living Legends is one of the most innovative framing companies in western Canada and has been building quality homes in Edmonton and the surrounding area for the past five years. Led by Jesse D'aoust, the company has developed an effective hybrid framing process that significantly reduces delivery time while also increasing onsite safety. Through a process that combines traditional stick framing with modern prefab techniques, Living Legends has successfully secured their place in the residential home building market.

Jesse has been working in the framing world for 18 years in Edmonton and, for much of that time, he worked for a variety of other companies. In his first year alone, he worked for nine different employers and experienced firsthand the workplace-culture problems that exist within the framing and construction world to this day. He found his bosses to be inconsistent and unprofessional when it came to paying employees. Workers were not always paid for the hours they put in at the job site. Finally, he landed a job working for a prefab company which lasted about 10 years and led up to the founding of Living Legends Construction Inc. The prefab company's business model was to provide the same product as traditional framing but 10 times faster than through traditional methods. An average house takes three to four weeks to frame, while it takes merely two to three days using prefab techniques.



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After a number of years learning the prefab business, Jesse was approached by a colleague who was starting his own company and invited Jesse to be a partner in it; thus, Living Legends was born. With their goal to compete with existing prefab companies in mind, they got their stick framing technique as efficient as possible and combined it with borrowed techniques from their days in the prefab business. Through a combination of techniques, they have developed a hybrid system and can build a house in three to four days while keeping quality, delivery time, and most importantly, safety, at the top of their list. Living Legends can accomplish what prefab companies do but without all the overhead. Jesse explains: “It is not always efficient to prefab everything just because we can. It is about finding the sweet spot in efficiency.”

Jesse’s approach to developing an efficient methodology is one of trial and error. With the development of any new system, there is a risk involved, and a lot of people are afraid of taking the chance. Most of the time, however, the risk pays off and any mistakes made in the process are not hard to fix. Jesse believes in “Trial and error, and at the same time, being creative.” When it comes to trying something new, he notes that it is always important to ask the question: “is it possible?” If it is, then he and his team “go ahead and develop the technique.” This is how they mix innovation and tradition in a dynamic fashion.

Living Legends consists of four hourly crews totalling 36 people. They also have three subcontracting crews of two to four people each. Subcontracting crews build two to four houses a month, while hourly crews build six houses a month. A traditional framing crew consists of about three to five people, while at Living Legends an average crew consists of about eight people. Keeping eight people busy on a small site might seem impossible from a traditional standpoint, but the hybrid prefab technique developed at Living Legends keeps those eight workers consistently busy, like a mobile assembly line, and thus increases efficiency on site. For instance, a roof can be assembled on the ground and craned up into place using a Telehandler. Using a Telehandler reduces time spent working at heights and, thus, increases safety on site as well. In addition, for the past four years, Living Legends has not run generators or power cords on site. They use battery operated machinery thereby eliminating trip hazards and increasing efficiency.



“Today, Living Legends is building over 350 houses a year.”



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Living Legends' business model is designed for high volume builders who want to take advantage of their value stream map and save time. While they can frame anything, they are essentially geared toward builders who build 150-plus homes a year. Today, Living Legends is building over 350 houses a year. They have teamed up with Daytona Homes as their current main customer and do 95% of their work.

While it is not one job in particular that stands above the rest, what Jesse is most proud of are model specific achievements. They currently build a rental property product line for Daytona Homes consisting of a three-storey four-plex, with legal suites on the main floor. Recently, new building techniques on the third-floor system have brought the standard build time down to 12 days from 15 days. Living Legends was able to reduce the build time by three days in two major ways. The first thing they did was to plan with the builder to put in four buildings side by side and capped the floors of each of them and used the floors as a level square platform. In doing so, they were able to prefab the floors on the ground and boomed panels of floors into place. This technique was highly successful and saved a full day on site. The second thing they did was to use the level foundations next door with nice flat floors to pull grid lines and square up. They used this as a footprint to shoot the entire roof together and sheet it on the ground and lift it up into place by crane fully assembled. This technique cut the roof build time in half.



“Living Legends provides career path opportunities where you can start your own company and be successful”

At Living Legends, it is a culture first mentality. They want it to be a place where people want to work. The formula to achieve this is quite simple: take care of the fundamentals. Pay people for their work and never miss a paycheck. Living Legends also pays overtime and pays out vacation, considered a rarity in the industry. Other benefits include a \$200/year boot allowance, and employee apparel purchase program. They focus on recognizing potential in their employees and creating and fostering opportunities for them. “Typical framing companies do not train their people but hold them back. The thought process has been if they teach their guys everything they know, their guys will go and start their own companies. Living Legends provides career path opportunities where you can start your own company and be successful.” An example of this is that each one of their subcontracting crews are made up of previous employees. They were able to continue working for Living Legends but on a subcontracting basis. “There has to be something in it for the employee, and it is more than just a paycheck with Living Legends.” Living Legends strives to create opportunities to help an individual to grow and to improve his/her life. Living Legends treats people with respect and expects employees to treat each other with respect. They do not tolerate talking down to anyone, whether you are a leader or not.

What lies ahead for Living Legends? Their main goal is to continue to grow their customer base. They would like to approach 100 employees, which would translate to about 1,000 houses built each year. Jesse takes pride in seeing people grow. He ponders: “who will rise to the occasion? Who will be the next crew leaders? Who will start with no experience and go off to start their own companies?” As Living Legends continues to grow, there is no doubt Jesse’s questions will find their answers.

Living Legends is hiring, visit: [Careers – Living Legends Construction Inc. \(living-legends.ca\)](https://living-legends.ca)