



Benefits of Mostly Vermont Based Projects

Vermont Frames is a building company that makes structural timber frame buildings. Found in Starksboro, Vermont Frames has been building frames for residential and commercial structures since 1976. The frames are built in Vermont and can be shipped to places across the U.S. and Canada. The company also installs structural insulation panels (SIP). Company president Jim Giroux has been with the business since 1982. He started as a carpenter with the business while finishing up his education at the University of Vermont. Since its start Vermont Frames has grown into a sizable company usually having 25-30 employees. Jim shared that most of the company's work is for residential structures, and much of the time clients are quite knowledgeable and know what they want in their structure. While using print ads and google business listings to advertise, direct referrals from past clients sharing their name generates most of their business. Jim estimated that they have done around 3,000 projects in their 40+ years in business, which means there are many past clients who continue to share their name.

Like other businesses, Vermont Frames was shutdown for several weeks when the Coronavirus pandemic struck in March. While being shut down projects continued to be coordinated virtually. The company's workload has been consistently busy after reopening for two reasons. The first was that 2020 was already set to be a busy year for the company before the Coronavirus came. After reopening, the business had to make up for lost time on the projects that were stalled because of the shutdown. The second reason was people moving to Vermont and other rural areas from urban places. Many people accelerated already planned projects in attempts to move out of the harder hit urban areas. Jim remembered a similar phenomenon happening in the aftermath of the September 11th terror attacks in 2001. The combination of these factors has led to a constant line of work all year.

The business has implemented State-mandated and new company safety protocols which workers have been cooperative in obeying. Jim gave the example of taking multiple trucks when shipping a frame or heading to a worksite to space workers out more, instead of all sharing one vehicle. Implementation of new guidelines has also been helped by the fact that most projects have been in-state this year. Normally, the bulk of their work is out of state in places throughout New England. This year however, the company has benefited from having a mostly Vermont based projects. As projects out of state begin to pick up again there may be some challenges when it comes to travel restrictions and workers who may not feel comfortable traveling out of state, but that is not something they have had to face yet.

The pandemic has not led to any infrastructure needs for the company. It has not led to changes in the products or services they offer either. Interest rates remain very good so people are still willing to build houses now. The pandemic has caused some supply chain issues for Vermont Frames, however. The company has found it difficult to get certain materials during the year, and

when they can get them, they are higher priced than normal. For instance, Jim shared that pressure treated lumber was in short supply in the spring. It is now available, but expensive because of the demand for it. The unavailability of items has affected the timetables of some of their projects.

When asked about lessons learned through the pandemic so far Jim mentioned increased safety, particularly when it comes to hygiene. The pandemic has brought an increased understanding of how germs spread and hygiene practices to all people. This new understanding is something Jim feels will continue on in how the company operates.

When it comes to the strengths of Vermont Frames, Jim listed experience as the main one. Vermont Frames is one of the oldest frame companies in New England so it boasts years of experience in the frame industry. Many in the company have worked at Vermont Frames for many years. Vermont Frames' workforce is very knowledgeable in all aspects of the work. Jim also said their ability to install structural insulated panels is a unique aspect of their business. Usually, companies focus on doing the frame or the panels. The ability to provide both sets Vermont Frames apart from other frame businesses. Jim and others at Vermont Frames are willing to share their expertise with other timber framers. Jim said timber framing is a small industry and he is always will to help fellow framers in the challenges that may arise to keep them going.

Jim feels that the Vermont Woodworks Council is a good cause which is why his business joined. While not being like most of the other businesses that are in the Council, he likes supporting it because of the support it provides for the Vermont wood industry. He encouraged others to join saying, "Anything that can make the wood industry better, do it." He also feels it is an organization that is helpful in promoting care of the forests. This is important to Jim as he said, "We are here for a short period of time. The woods will be here longer." While not a highly active member, Jim enjoys the monthly newsletter because it keeps him informed and updated on the industry.