

A SALUTE TO A CUSTOMER



LANGMAN CONSTRUCTION, INC.

Quad Cities underground utility and earthmoving contractor thrives on tough jobs



Charles H. Langman, President of Langman Construction, Inc., a Rock Island (Illinois) based contractor that specializes in earthmoving and underground utility projects.

The tougher and more complicated a job is, the better Charles H. Langman of Langman Construction, Inc., likes it.

"We make our money on the tougher jobs that other people don't want to do," noted Langman, who founded his Rock Island (Illinois) contracting company in October, 1974. "Like the more difficult sewer and water jobs that involve deep cuts in wet conditions or that are complicated with rock removal."

Chuck Langman is the third generation of his family to work in the construction industry. "My father, Richard Langman, took a construction business over from his father, and he had his office in his home," said Langman. "I grew up watching my dad run a business and going out with him on jobs. I was trained from the time I was six or seven years old to run a construction company, which is all I ever wanted to do."

Liked heavy, highway work

After graduating from the University of Illinois with bachelor's (1970) and master's (1971) degrees in civil

engineering, Langman worked for his father for four years. Richard Langman was in the building end of the construction industry, but his son was interested in highway work. "At first he wasn't in favor of it, but eventually he began thinking it was a good deal that I split off," said Langman. "He was a big help getting started."

Working alone, Langman started off "doing a little rehab work for the city of Rock Island and its Model Cities program, remodeling homes, doing sidewalks and driveways," he remembered. "I did a lot of concrete patching, some roofing and even some interior remodeling for the Model Cities program. They were things that did not require a lot of capital investment in equipment. And I picked up some backhoe-loaders."

Langman Construction's first "big" project was a \$400,000 street job for the city of Moline in 1976. "The city had put out an initial contract to do some culvert work to tie the smaller streets into 41st Street," explained Langman. "We got the culverts for \$150,000 and we built them. We were right out there when 41st Street came up for bid, so we did some checking and said, 'Why not?'"

Langman bid the job and won the contract to build 41st Street from the ground up. "The first thing we had to do was strip the ground because it was nothing but a cornfield," he stated. "We did that, hauled in a lot of fill to prepare our sub-base, and then ran the sewer and water and poured the street."

Underground utilities a specialty

Today Langman Construction, Inc., specializes in underground utility work. The company employs from as few as 75 people during the winter to a peak-season high of 175. Most of its work is public, though "we're probably doing a little bit more private work than we used to," said Langman. "We're a little more comfortable with some of the major generals. I would say it's probably a 75-percent governmental, 25-percent large private mix."



Operators of Komatsu D155 and D65 dozers work in tandem at an ongoing mine reclamation project near Knoxville, Iowa.



Langman Construction, Inc. counts on a large fleet of Komatsu equipment from RMS, including this PC400LC-6 hydraulic excavator.

Langman crews tackle projects in the firm's hometown of Rock Island, in surrounding Mercer County in Illinois and in the other four Quint Cities — East Moline, Moline, Illinois, and Davenport and Bettendorf, Iowa.

"We prefer to do most of our work around here so the guys can stay home," said Langman. "We get maybe a couple of jobs a year an hour or an hour and a half away. Iowa City and the Burlington area have been good to us. We probably do more work in Dubuque than any other area outside of town. We've worked in Cedar Rapids, Cedar Falls, Marshalltown and a lot of smaller communities in Iowa."

Assisting Langman in running his company are Vice President/Secretary John Lester and Controller Mark Evans. Another key employee, Field Coordinator John Bromley, "was one of our first or second employees," added Langman. "He died a little over a year ago of cancer. John was such a talented person. He graduated from Rock Island's building trades program and came in as an 18-year-old. John ran all our field operations successfully for a long time. There's a lot of people who think a lot of him."

Kyle Kennelly is Langman's concrete and dirt superintendent "who also bids and estimates," added Langman. "Underground Superintendent Warren Johnson runs the sewer and water. Pat Skrome is our new field coordinator in Illinois. He took over for John."

Langman noted that he employs many excellent superintendents in the field, including "the three Stutzel guys, Tom, Steve and Danny, two brothers and a son, and Roy Pritchett, who always run our toughest sewer jobs," he smiled. "And we have operators and pipelayers who have been with us

forever. We also have a very good office staff that has been together for years."

Knoxville operation

Langman Construction, Inc. also has an operation in Knoxville, Iowa, under the supervision of Jan Stanley, who runs the office, and Chuck Force, who works in the field. The Knoxville branch was established in the late 1980s to tackle projects in central Iowa.

"We were wanting to expand and we were working in Iowa anyway," Langman recalled. "We were having difficulty getting people to leave their homes and spend the work week in a hotel. In order to keep that market, one of our fellows, Jan Stanley, was willing to settle there."

"It was rough in the beginning until we got settled in," he continued. "Now it's like anything else, some years are better than others, but it's mostly been good. We work in the smaller communities just outside of Des Moines. The city itself has been a tough market for us."

Railroad relocation

Langman Construction crews have tackled a wide variety of difficult jobs over the years, but the most challenging was a railroad relocation project in Dubuque for the Iowa Department of Transportation in the mid-1980s.

"What we were doing was removing rail and replacing it in locations that didn't conflict with Highway 61 in downtown Dubuque," Langman explained. "We were trying to make access through Dubuque easier. The railroads were assigned to our contract, and we were directly responsible for the scheduling, construction and completion of the \$18 million project."

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Service ethic drives excavating business

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The complicated project found Langman operators working in large tunnels “where we had to put little backhoes in the pipe and dig,” said Langman. “We took out the rail line, graded out the new railroad beds, put in the ballast, graded for the new roadway that went in where the old rails were, and finally poured the concrete.”

As subcontractors, the railroads installed their own rail. “We had to make sure that the rail access was available throughout the project,” noted Langman. “We had to coordinate construction so that the tie-ins would be made at appropriate times that would not hurt the businesses using the rail services.

“That was probably the main challenge — scheduling,” Langman continued. “And the timing was very critical. There was a large incentive bonus that we divided among all the players.”

Langman Construction crews completed a year-and-a-half-long, \$5 million sewer improvement job for the city of Marshalltown, Iowa, last summer. “There was a lot of directional boring,” said Langman. “We had a lot of dewatering and some deeper cuts.”

The company recently completed the dirt work and installed the sewer and water utilities for a new housing development in Iowa City.

Working from both banks

Another challenging \$1 million project involved building coffer dams and levies near Toolesboro, Iowa,

for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Intake and out-take structures along the Mississippi River had been destroyed by flooding, so Langman Construction was hired to excavate new coffer dams and levies.

“That was interesting, because we were out in the middle of the Mississippi River building two different structures with two different depths of water for fish and fowl,” commented Langman. “Roads led into the area, so crews started at two different parts of the bank and just dumped dirt until we joined. We had water on both sides of the coffer dam. We put wells every 50 feet and pumped out on the land side over into the river, ran our wells and kept our work area dry.

“We built the structure, and when it was built, we put a levy across to control the amount of water that came,” continued Langman. “You let it come in at the upstream end, and then when the river drops, you shut it off, so you can control the flow into the wildlife area.”

A current project reclaiming a limestone mine near Knoxville for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources is the “fourth or fifth mine reclamation we’ve done in the last couple of years,” said Langman.

Heavy-duty equipment required

When Langman Construction began doing mine reclamation, Chuck Langman turned to heavy-duty Komatsu dozers from Road Machinery and Supplies Company to handle the heavy lifting and hauling. RMS Territory Manager Gary Kosman, who works out of the company’s Milan, Illinois branch, services the Langman account.

Because he was unsure of the market, Langman decided to rent two Komatsu crawler dozers, a D65 and a D155, from RMS for the first mine job. “We had some Komatsu excavators that we used in our sewer work,” noted Langman. “We’ve had Komatsu excavators virtually from the beginning of our company, so Komatsu is not new to us.”

The two dozers Langman rented “were very well received,” he stated. “So when it came time to purchase, we bought Komatsu. We’re very comfortable with the equipment. The pricing was competitive. We bought three tractors mainly to help us start into the dirt work, which we’ve been doing more and more of lately.” Langman Construction’s fleet includes three Komatsu excavators — two PC400s and a PC250 — and four Komatsu crawler dozers — a D155, a D65, a D41 and a D61.

The Komatsu D155 crawler dozer is Langman’s largest tractor. “It’s the one that the fellows feel



RMS Territory Manager Gary Kosman (left) with Charles Langman.



An operator gets a full blade with a Komatsu D155 dozer at Langman Construction's mine reclamation project near Knoxville, Iowa.

performs the best for its size," noted Langman. "This tractor doesn't stall. It's easy for the operators to operate. It has very few mechanical problems. We consider it to be a large tractor and a good one."

Langman's Komatsu D41 dozer has a six-way blade and is used for final grading touches on the company's excavation projects. "It's often used to move dirt along slopes, to build terraces and final-grade dikes," Langman commented.

Langman uses the Komatsu D65 dozer on his company's larger dirt jobs, such as the mine reclamation projects. "It works great because it's very productive," he emphasized. "It will out-produce some of the bigger Brand X machines, so we use it on our main dirt jobs."

As for RMS, "we're very comfortable with their support," stated Langman. "We consider RMS one of the top two or three dealers. And I enjoy working with Gary very much."

Luck and good people

In addition to aggressively pursuing more difficult jobs, Chuck Langman credits his company's success over the years to good employees and some lucky breaks.

"Having a good team and keeping the team together has helped us thrive," said Langman. "We've also received some breaks. In the late 1970s, there was a big flood. It was a disastrous thing, but we did a half million dollars worth of work in a couple of weeks. We were able to put every piece of equipment we had out at a fair rate. It got us a tractor

that was desperately needed. So there have been some things that have just simply been lucky."

Along with bigger profit margins, the tough projects Langman Construction likes to tackle also bring bigger challenges. "When you take tougher jobs and make a mistake and it starts going wrong, I think one thing that has helped us is that we stick with it and get it done," stated Langman.

"We've had some jobs go south," he admitted. "As hard as it is, we hung in there, ran them to a conclusion, took the loss and went on. We've always honored our commitments and contracts. All you can do is get it done and then hope that you can pick up other jobs that will make money and get you back in the black."

Langman's daughter, Tara, a senior at the University of Notre Dame in business, is also planning to go into the industry. "I'd like to help her start her own business," said her father. "In fact I see her having her own business and doing OK. And I think my son would like to take over this one, so we could have two separate companies."

Langman's son Richard is just 13, so Chuck Langman will be at the helm of Langman Construction, Inc. for quite a few more years. That's OK with him.

"I enjoy getting up and going to work, whereas I know some people don't," said Langman. "I like being able to make decisions, buy equipment and make things happen, like a new development, once in a while. The business has also allowed me to offer job opportunities to family and friends."