In 31 years of business, Daniel Lange Sr., president of Lange Drywall, Inc., in Waukesha, Wis. (about 15 miles from Milwaukee), has had many big jobs. But none as big as the largest building in the state—Miller Park, the newly constructed baseball stadium for the Milwaukee Brewers. The overall project, including parking lots and other infrastructure, cost $750 million, with the building itself at $400 million. The stadium, seating 43,000 people, just opened on April 6, 2001.

The Brewers won.

The construction of Miller Park was managed by the HCH Miller Park Joint Venture team of the Hunt Construction Group, Indianapolis, the Clark Construction of Maryland, and Hunzinger Construction of Milwaukee. The lead wall and
Lange Drywall Plays a Vital Role in the Building of Milwaukee’s Miller Park

ceiling contractor was The Bouma Corporation, Grand Rapids, Mich., under the direction of President J.J. Bouma. Also on board was Kite, Inc., out of Indianapolis, which Hunt Construction had worked with over the years. Hunzinger had a long relationship with Lange—some 24 years.

The job for the three wall and ceiling contractors—all AWCI members—totaled $16 million. Bouma did most of the purchasing and handled the management side of the project. Lange and Kite were responsible for the installation. In addition to its part in the installation, Lange acted as the onsite project manager, and was responsible for the coordination of the implementation of all the insulation, steel studs, drywall, acoustical ceilings, shaftwall assemblies, acoustic wall panels, athletic equipment, the synthetic grass floor, all the tile and carpeting, the exterior insulation and finish system, fence and wall padding, netting and escalator stainless steel cladding. The lead superintendent, Pat Schoenike, has been a Lange employee of 12 years.

The volume of material used included about 1.8 million feet of drywall, 300,000 feet of EIFS, 260,000 feet of acoustical ceilings, and 60,000 square yards of carpeting. Lange coordinated all the different subs doing this work.

Now at Bat

There were many challenges in constructing this 500,000-ton structure. One of the biggest, Lange says, was working during periods of heavy snow and rain, for there were no self-contained roofed and glassed-in areas that could be heated. Instead, various areas were tented in. “There were a lot of heights,” Lange says. “There were extremely high walls, up to 40 feet, often sitting on walls already 18 to 20 feet.”

Miller Park is the only ball park with a retractable roof. It pivots so the roof slides out on either side. In other words, there will be no more games called on account of rain in Milwaukee. The seven-panel roof weighs about 12,000 tons and takes about 10 minutes to open or close. But this innovation came at a cost. During construction part of the dome fell and the crane collapsed, killing three steel workers. Lange’s
company was not involved in this accident, which set back the project a year.

There are five levels to the structure. The club concourse is carpeted. Several restaurants and bars are built in the area. There are 20 founder suites, and 80 club level suites that can be purchased, complete with sliding glass doors leading to a suite room, kitchenette and bathroom. These classy suites are just to provide luxury seating for the games.

Site work on this project began in 1996. The building was started in 1998. Lange started working on site in February 1999. And, though some minor details were still being attended to when this article was written in April, the stadium was ready and open for the first game April 6.

From Rookie to Pro

Miller Park is the biggest project of Lange’s career. But, of course, he didn’t start at the top. He started in the trade as a union journeyman carpenter and worked for several different firms before striking out on his own in 1970. For the first eight years he did residential drywall for housing and apartments. He then proceeded into commercial steel studs, which he now does, along with drywall, acoustic ceilings, insulation, structural light gauge framing and EIFS.

Lange made the transition into commercial construction, leaving residential behind for a couple of reasons. One was that he saw more of a long-range opportunity in commercial work. Secondly, at about that time, a lot of the housing contractors were going nonunion. Lange, who started out as a union carpenter, always had a natural empathy with unions and wanted to remain a union company. His employees belong to both the Carpenters and Painters unions.

With his background, Lange doesn’t have what is often a management antagonism toward unions.

“We’ve found that the guys with better skills are in the union,” he says. “We’ve felt that, to be successful, we need skilled union people. Our choice has been to be and stay union, and the unions have respected that and have worked with us. Under the
The home of the Milwaukee Brewers seats 43,000 people.

terms that we’ve operated, I think this has been a strong factor in making our customers satisfied with our work.”

Lange adds that the unions have a good training program, and he works with them to train workers from the ground up. This training helps when dealing with the skilled labor shortage that affects his part of the country as well as most other parts.

He's Safe

Lange works the greater Milwaukee metropolitan area and has done a range of projects, from $25,000 to $50,000 up to $2 million usually. “We do a lot of office parks, hospitals and schools,” Lange says. “It’s a very competitive market. We’ve built our reputation on quality and service, which is our big selling point. We’ve never missed a deadline. I believe that we have to satisfy our customers; they’re the ones who will decide whether we are a success or not.”

The company has an emphasis on safety. “We have a good safety program,” he says. “All the foremen have toolbox talks once a week, which are monitored, and everybody has to attend. We send people to safety classes, as well as to manufacturer equipment seminars. We also bring in insurance people to make presentations.”

Lange has 50 to 75 employees, depending on the season, and his annual sales range from $5 million to $8 million.

Has he made any mistakes in 31 years of business?

“Sure, you make mistakes,” he replies. “But we always try to learn from our mistakes, as well as our successes. I think that’s what ultimately makes you successful. You learn, and move forward. Every time you make a bid, it’s a risk, to an extent. You wonder why you got it. Then you have to tear it apart and reconstruct it into different pockets of information, print it on the computer, and go with it.”

About 80 percent of Lange’s work is bid. The other 20 percent is negotiated, which Lange works out with his long-time customers.

“I believe that to be successful you have to surround yourself with successful people and have good teamwork,” Lange says. “You have to have everyone involved in the decisions, and allow
them the opportunities to be proactive. The foremen and superintendents are especially proactive. They all put in their ideas and our commitment is to choose the best ones, no matter where they come from.”

“Some of the walls in Miller Park are 40 feet or higher.

Grand Slam

Lange Drywall is also a family business. Lange’s wife, Ruth is the office manager. She handles the billing, payroll, taxes and other paper work. Lange started in the field, and that’s where he likes to be.

“I’m the field guy,” he says. “That’s where my training is, so I like to spend the day in the trenches, coming up with solutions to problems.”

The Langes have six children. The oldest, Daniel Jr., 37, went to college to get an engineering degree, then came back to be a part of the business; he’s chief estimator and vice president.

Lange says he has been a member of AWCI for as long as he can remember. “We get a lot of good information from AWCI, and I do enjoy going to the yearly meeting to meet the vendors. We see the new products that are available. AWCI is probably the best support system I’ve ever had.”

Lange, 59, enjoys travels, and likes to hunt and fish. But, for the most part, he considers himself a workaholic. On the other hand, he says he’s not driven. “I do enjoy the work, and am grateful to have the chance to do the work I love doing.”

Is the giant Miller Park project going to change the way Lange does business or his lifestyle? His answer is negative. “We may get a little notoriety, but we will still maintain the same relationships and continue to do the same kind of work we’ve done for so many years.

“I will say, though, that, the other day, when I drove my grandson past Miller Park, it felt good to say to him that I had a part in building it.”