

The second class of the NALC Leadership Academy for 2008 met for its first round of classroom training August 10-15 at the National Labor College in suburban Washington. The 30 Academy students, representing all 15 NALC regions, covered a range of topics during the intensive week, including the structure and history of the union, ethics, the teaching process and a special "Ask the President" session. The students will return for a second week of classes October 5-10, before working with back-home mentors on projects they will present during their final week, December 7-12.



## Eligible carriers face deadline for 'early-out'

**C**ity letter carriers and other craft employees have until November 21 to decide whether to accept the offer of a voluntary early retirement from the Postal Service. The "early-out" would be effective February 28, 2009.

Details of the early retirement program, long-anticipated and the subject of much speculation, finally emerged the first week of September. Carriers who are eligible will first receive an annuity estimate letter in early October, then a week later, a letter formally offering the early-out and providing information on how to proceed.

NALC President William H. Young said the union is taking no position on the early retirement option. That decision must be based on each carrier's personal circumstances, he said.

"I urge anyone considering the offer to sit down with your family and carefully review your financial situation, the impact on your monthly retirement annuity, and other factors. Choosing to leave your job is a momentous decision," Young said.

No financial incentives or bonuses are being offered to those who take the early-out. Young noted that some postal employees may wait to see whether the Postal Service dangles cash to encourage departures, but he stressed, "We have received no indication whatsoever such bonuses are likely or even possible."

The Postal Service sought the Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) from the federal Office of Personnel Management so it could cut operating costs by shrinking its payroll and eliminating older, higher-paid workers. Declining mail volume because of the

poor economy and electronic diversion of revenue-rich billing and payments mail, as well as increased automation, are cited as reasons for the effort to slash expenses and reduce complement across the board.

Information about the offer is available on the USPS employee website, [www.lite-blue.usps.gov](http://www.lite-blue.usps.gov). Active letter carriers may access the site by using their employee identification number and password.

The offer will apply to letter carriers who are at least 50 years of age with at least 20 years of creditable federal service, or to those at any age with 25 years of service, as of the VERA effective date, February 28, 2009. If you don't meet the criteria by that date, you are not eligible for voluntary early retirement.

A sample offer letter on the website says letter carriers must decide whether to accept the offer by 8:30 p.m. ET on Friday, November 21—and that decision cannot be changed once the deadline passes.

"Since the Postal Service will rely on your decision to retire in developing its complement management plans, your decision to retire will become IRREVOCABLE at (the Nov. 21) closing date of the VERA window period," the letter says. Individuals who have second thoughts can withdraw a retirement application before the deadline by submitting a written notification.

NALC Director of Retired Members Ernie Kirkland said city carriers who believe they are eligible but who do not receive an offer letter by October 20 should contact their National Business Agent's office (*NBA offices are listed on the inside front cover*). ☒