

Leadership Academy founder encourages grads to make themselves, their union stronger



NALC Leadership Academy founder Jim Williams encourages the graduates to find members back home who they can help mentor.

“This Academy is not necessarily about growing people. It’s about growing our union,” retired Executive Vice President Jim Williams told the 32nd graduating class of the NALC Leadership Academy. “And by growing people and investing in them, you grow the union.”

Williams, the founder of the Academy, returned to preside over the graduation ceremony held on May 15 at the Maritime

Conference Center in Linthicum Heights, MD, just south of Baltimore.

The commencement event capped several months of intensive training on the skills necessary for union members to become effective leaders. Under the tutelage of their mentors—established NALC leaders such as branch presidents—the students combined three separate weeks of classroom learning at the Maritime Conference Center with take-home assignments and special projects.

During their classes, students took part in often lively discussions on such subjects as the *National Agreement* and the union’s legislative agenda. They also learned more about the Dispute Resolution Process, strategic planning, branch financial responsibilities, safety and health, retirement issues, route protection, workers’ compensation, effective negotiation techniques and the use of social media for branch communications.

Each week of the Academy also includes an emphasis on fine-tuning effective written and oral communication skills. Back in their branches, graduates will make use of those skills in such forums as membership meetings, awards ceremonies and dinners.

Williams encouraged this latest batch of graduates to keep learning and trying new things, even when they’re uncomfortable.

“When I started as a letter carrier, I really expected to work 36 years and retire as a letter carrier,” he said. “I had no idea that I would be so blessed as to work for a union that gave me opportunity after opportunity after opportunity. And I didn’t think I deserved it either. I didn’t think that I had skills that would enable me to become a steward, to become an arbitration advocate.

“I still remember sitting in my first arbitration hearing and being scared to death. But you know what? I did what I needed to do when I needed to do it. And somehow, some way, I found the wherewithal to keep going, even though it was uncomfortable for me.

“And so, put yourself out there. Always put yourself on thin ice, because the danger of failure is what will cause you to push yourself forward,” he said.

The Leadership Academy attendees were taught firsthand by President Brian L. Renfroe, other NALC national officers, and Headquarters letter carrier and professional staff members who teach classes on a wide variety of topics. The attendees also were guided by daily class instructors: former National Business Agents (NBAs) Troy Clark and Chris Wittenburg; Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 President Keisha Lewis; Region 5 Regional Administrative Assistant Larrissa Parde; and Assistant to the President Ed Morgan.



The Leadership Academy attendees spent three weeks doing classwork in Maryland.



Williams explained to the graduates that even though this was the end of the Academy, it isn't the end of their education, encouraging them to never stop learning.

"We work for an employer who likes to start programs. Most of them don't go so well, as we know," he said. "We want people who finish what they do. And so, your job now is to go home and to take everything that you've learned. We teach you, we give you information, we give you tools, and all of that is given to you as an investment in you so that you finish well.

"We don't want to be a union that loses energy as we get close to the finish line. We don't want to be a union that doesn't expend every ounce

of energy we have representing the members that depend on us. And that means that you need to be committed for the long haul.

"Where are you going to be in five years, 10 years, 15 years from now? You need to make sure that you set your heart, set your mind, set your goal to continue to do whatever you can to bolster what this union stands for.

"So how will you be measured? You'll be measured by how you finish, not how you start. And this is just the beginning for you," he concluded.

After the commencement, the graduates were assigned to work at their respective NBA offices for a week to learn in a different environment. **PR**

Leadership Academy Class 32

Gilbert Paredes receives his certificate from retired Executive Vice President Jim Williams (l) and retired National Business Agent Chris Wittenburg.



NALC Leadership Academy Class 32 graduates

Aldo Alvarez
Des Plaines, IL Branch 2076

James Asquith
Camden, NJ Merged
Branch 540

Michael Badia
Marina, CA Branch 6385

Catherine Baird
Paoli, PA Branch 4317

Brooke Bollom
Bismarck, ND Branch 957

Linda Brightful
Baltimore, MD Branch 176

James Collins
Knoxville, TN Branch 419

Darren Connors
Spacecoast Florida
Branch 2689

Kelsey Crosbie
Columbus, OH Branch 78

Candido Diaz
Charlotte, NC Branch 545

Rebekah Dupree
Jasper, AL Branch 3099

Edward Dyer
New York, NY Branch 36

Casey English
Portland, OR Branch 82

James Fowler
Wenatchee, WA Branch 1350

Johnny Gardner
Elmira, NY Branch 21

Jay Gober
Abilene, TX Branch 950

Leslie Greene
New Castle, PA Branch 22

Michael Hedglin
New Jersey Merged
Branch 38

Kathryn Hunter
Southwest Michigan
Branch 246

Rachel Janecek
DeKalb, IL Branch 706

Linda Johnson
Duluth, MN Branch 114

Jessica McIlvaine
Southwest Missouri
Branch 366

Jarod Miner
Pueblo, CO Branch 229

Ross Murray
Roanoke, VA Branch 524

Gilbert Paredes
Massachusetts Northeast
Merged Branch 25

Jose Portales
San Antonio, TX Branch 421

Christina Ramirez
Sun City, AZ Branch 6156

Zachary Schassberger
Ann Arbor, MI Branch 434

Kraig Shafer
Cape Girardeau, MO
Branch 1015

Andre Wilkerson
Danville, VA Branch 595