



The William F. Bolger Center: A Legacy of Leadership and Learning

In the fall of 1980, the United States Postal Service made a bold investment in its future.¹ After an exhaustive two-year search, the Board of Governors approved the purchase of an 84-acre property in the “lush rolling” hills of Potomac, Maryland.² The once pastoral estate of the Sisters of Mercy was purchased for \$6.8 million. A total of \$28.1 million was invested to create a self-contained Management Training and Conference Center that would unify and elevate leadership development across the USPS.

Origins Rooted in Purpose

The land itself carries a storied past. In 1920, financier Lyman B. Kendall purchased 1,000 acres of Maryland countryside, naming it Kentsdale. Following his death in 1929, the Sisters of Mercy acquired the estate, transforming it into a spiritual and educational haven. Over time, parcels were sold off—an 18-room mansion became a Franciscan monastery, and the McAuley Park subdivision emerged, its streets honoring pioneering members of the order.

The five-story Generalate, completed in 1959 and now known as the Osgood Building, stood as a symbol of the Sisters’ commitment. But by the late 1970s, shifting tides within the Catholic Church led to a decline in religious vocations. The Sisters quietly offered the property for sale, and the Postal Service saw an opportunity to adapt the site for its own mission.

A Strategic Shift

The Postal Service Institute—established in 1968—had been the primary training site, using leased space in Bethesda, Maryland. With another training facility in Philadelphia, the arrangement was costly and inefficient.³ The Potomac site offered a solution: centralization, accessibility, and long-term savings. With 40 percent of USPS employees located within a 500-mile radius, the location was ideal.

Residents of McAuley Park sued to block the purchase, fearing traffic and deriding it as a “luxury spa” or “country club for postal managers.”⁴ But USPS spokesperson Megaera Ausman pointed out that the Sisters of Mercy “did not run a luxury hotel.”⁵ Vice President George H. W. Bush and the General Accounting Office reviewed the plan and deemed it fiscally sound. USPS responded with thoughtful measures: discouraging private vehicles, offering shuttle service, and maintaining 24-hour security through the Postal Service Police Force.

Building a Center of Excellence

The transformation was swift and intentional. The former St. Maurice School—once a haven for special needs children—was renovated into the Franklin Building, featuring 26 classrooms and capacity for nearly 600 students. USPS added five guest wings, a hotel check-in facility, a 230-seat cafeteria, conference rooms, and recreational spaces. Dormitory accommodations totaled 489 rooms.

The instructional model was equally ambitious: 72 master instructors on rotating three-year assignments, delivering over 100 courses ranging from two days to three weeks. By 1992, the center trained approximately 12,000 supervisors, managers, and administrators annually.

Honoring a Postal Pioneer

In January 1985, the facility was renamed the William F. Bolger Management Academy, honoring the 66th Postmaster General—a man who rose from entry-level clerk to the highest office in the Postal Service. In 1996, the name evolved again: the William F. Bolger Center for Leadership Development, reflecting a broader mission. It serves as the Postal Service's primary national training facility, dedicated to providing a premier environment for managers to develop, plan, and grow.

Developing Leaders

Key leadership programs held there include the Advanced Leadership Program for high-potential managers, executive-level training initiatives for PCES executives, and the Managerial Leadership Program. The Bolger Center is also home to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service's accredited training and leadership development arm, the Career Development Unit. All new Postal Inspectors and Postal Police Officers must attend a residential training program at the academy to prepare for their duties.

The Bolger Center has welcomed not only USPS personnel but also international delegates from the Universal Postal Union. It has served as a venue for government agencies and private sector organizations, adapting through major renovations completed in the 1990s, 2009, and 2025. Today, the Bolger Center endures as a testament to vision and stewardship—a campus transformed into a lasting legacy of leadership.

HISTORIAN

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¹ United States Postal Service, *Construction Release No. 9*, press release, 7 October 1980, USPS Corporate Library, Washington, DC.

² Marjorie Hyer, "Sisters of Mercy Sell Headquarters and Ground In Potomac to Postal Service for \$6.8 Million," *Washington Post*, 8 October 1980.

³ United States Postal Service, *Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, 1980, 13.

⁴ "Postal building endorsed," *Baltimore Evening Sun*, 25 May 1981, 26.

⁵ Megaera Ausman, "The Good Old Days of the 2-cent Letter," *Baltimore Sun*, 22 July 1981, 10.