LACERA PostScript

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PLANNING A SECURE FUTURE

LOS ANGELES COUNTY EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION

VOL. 11 NO. 4 NEWS FOR ACTIVE MEMBERS SEPTEMBER 2001

Welcome

(and Welcome Back)

New Board of Retirement Members

Les Robbins

LACERA is pleased to welcome two new members to the Board of Retirement. Mr. John Fleming was elected to take the retiree seat left open by the passing of Robert A. Stotelmeyer, and Mr. Richard Wirth was appointed by County Mayor Antonovich to take the seat left open by the passing of Michael L. Falabrino. Both men were welcomed to their first Board meeting on August 1, 2001.

Will Pryor

In addition to our new Board members, Mr. Les Robbins has been re-elected to the Board of Retirement by Safety members and Mr. Will Pryor has regained his position as alternate Safety member on the Board. Their new terms will begin in January 2002, at the first meeting of the Board. A very warm welcome (and welcome back) to everyone!

Richard R. Wirth

Mr. Wirth is president of Wirth & Associates, a governmental relations firm with expertise in the process of government. While specializing in working with local governments throughout California, Wirth & Associates also provides services to clients relative to Federal and State of California issues.

Mr. Wirth received his undergraduate degree from Northern Illinois University. He did graduate work at Southern Illinois University and Interamericana University in Saltillo Mexico. He studied law at Santa Clara University.

Mr. Wirth began his career as an Assistant City Manager in Joliet, Illinois. In 1973 he became Director of Government Affairs for the Building Industry Association of Southern California with responsibility for the development of legislative programs in nine Southern California Counties. In 1980 an alliance of major California builders formed the Governmental Council as part of the Building Industry Association. Mr. Wirth served as Executive Director of the Governmental Affairs Council until 1994. In addition, he founded Wirth & Associates in 1985 in order to provide expertise to individual clients.

Throughout his career, Mr. Wirth has served on numerous Boards and Commissions at all levels of government and community-based organizations, including serving as the first Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Los Angeles County Housing Development Corporation. Among his community efforts, he helped found the Public Inebriate Program of Los Angeles and served as its Chairman for five years. He also served on the Board of Directors of the Mexican-American Opportunity Foundation where he was honored as the Man of the Year for his efforts in establishing day care centers. He presently serves on the Board of Directors of Moss Beach Homes, a major provider of private foster care throughout California.

John F. Fleming

Mr. Fleming served as a Legislative and Retiree Liaison staff representative for the Los Angeles County Professional Peace Officers Association, a position he held for 11 years from 1987 to 1998. In this capacity, his duties consisted of lobbying interests at State level and retiree representation in the nature of individual problem solving. He is also a member of the Board of Directors of the RELAC, a position he has held since 1985.

Mr. Fleming graduated from Cerritos College in 1958 where he received his AA Degree in Police Administration, and also attended Long Beach State College. He has earned a Lifetime Vocational Teaching Certificate, a State of California Advance Peace Officers Standards & Training (P.O.S.T.) Certificate, a State of California Community Relations Advance P.O.S.T. Certificate, and was a registered California State lobbyist. In 1953 Mr. Fleming entered the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, where he worked for 24 years. He retired in 1977 as a Deputy Sheriff with the rank of Sergeant.

Mr. Fleming was a member of the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles County Professional Peace Officers Association from 1959-1987, where he negotiated and signed the first contract for law enforcement under the Meyers-Milias-Brown Act for Deputy Sheriffs, and helped formulate various law enforcement benefits. He was also appointed to the California Commission on Aging where he was the primary advocate for four million seniors in California.

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PLANNING A SECURE FUTURE

LOS ANGELES COUNTY EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION

VOL. 11 NO. 4 NEWS FOR ACTIVE MEMBERS SEPTEMBER 2001

Member Annual Statements & Retirement Planning

Alice Natale

Are you a newly hired employee of Los Angeles County? Do you have questions about your retirement plans?

LACERA has a public counter that is open every day, Monday through Friday, from 7:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. During that time you are welcome to visit us and learn about your retirement plan. We also have a Call Center that can answer many questions about your plan. You may reach them at 800-786-6464, between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

ANNUAL STATEMENTS

These reports are designed to give you a chance to verify the personal information that we have on file for you. Instead of throwing your statement in a drawer for future reference, take the time to read through it to verify your beneficiaries (Plans A, B, C, and D) and your address. (Active members can change an address with your department's Personnel office.)

If you are eligible for retirement, your Annual Statement will show an estimate of the retirement benefits you would receive should you retire today. This estimate is based on age, service credit, and salary. Also included in the statement is a future estimate based upon the benefits you would receive if you continue working five more years. If you are not eligible to retire today, your statement will show a list of retirement eligibility requirements. In addition, the statement includes information about the type of membership you have, transferring plans, your years of service credit, and your eligibility to purchase prior service credit.

WHEN TO PLAN FOR RETIREMENT

The first day of work is the first day to start planning for your future. Once you receive LACERA's new employee orientation packet (with a brochure and plan election form), you have 60 days to make a decision about which retirement plan you want.

When taking stock of your financial situation, ask yourself a few key questions: What does the retirement plan mean to me? What benefits will I get? Who is taking my money? Will there be money for me when I retire?

This is where we come in. LACERA is responsible for investing the employee and employer contributions, which will be used to fund your future retirement. We also track your service credit, beneficiary designations, and various documents submitted by you during the course of your employment.

If you chose Plan D, or as a Safety Member you became a member of Plan B, you make retirement contributions as a part of the total retirement picture. If you selected the non-contributory plan, Plan E, the County will make contributions to LACERA on your behalf, but you do not contribute to the plan benefits.

After reviewing information from the County, you probably signed up for medical insurance and life insurance. You may also have chosen to participate in the County's 401(k) Savings Plan or 457 Horizons Plan, to assist in the growth of your personal investments.

No matter what benefits you chose, think of this as your long-range financial plan. You are deciding now what you will have in later years. Your goal should be to have a secure, financial future that frees you to enjoy your life as an older person. Remember, your LACERA pension money will go on as long as you live as a retiree. Now that we have one retiree who is 109 years of age, we can all be inspired to make our financial futures as secure as possible. You never know--you might be retired longer than you worked for the County! Make the most of your retirement. Plan smart.

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From the Executive Desk of Marsha Richter, LACERA's CEO

LACERA Benefits: Myths and Truths

As the CEO of LACERA, I often hear about misunderstandings concerning retirement plans, procedures, and other myths about the implementation of benefits. I'd like to try and clarify some of those myths here, and hopefully bring to light some of the more confusing ways that retirement law works.

If you still have questions after reading my explanations below, please feel free to call a LACERA Benefits Specialist for further information. And you can always go to the LACERA Web site to find updates on most pending retirement issues, or find definitions in the on-line glossary.

MYTH: When retirement legislation is passed into law, it becomes effective the first of the following year; urgency legislation becomes effective the day the Governor signs it into law.

TRUTH: This statement is confusing because it is both true and false. Yes, a bill does become law once it's been passed or signed by the Governor. However, just because a law is on the books doesn't necessarily mean that it will be implemented. In fact, most new retirement legislation does not become effective in LA County until the Board of Supervisors passes a resolution to adopt it, which is not a guaranteed action.

An example is the 3% at Age 50 Safety Formula. Although this legislation passed in 2000 and some other counties have already adopted this formula, it has not been adopted by the Board of Supervisors. If and when this law is adopted by an LA County Board of Supervisors resolution, the terms ultimately agreed upon may require additional legislation.

MYTH: LACERA is withholding information on pending legislation and updates on the MOUs.

TRUTH: The responsibility to report information that could affect your benefits is one that we take seriously. We realize that many of our members are anxious to see updates on new legislation, and we are dedicated to bringing you the information as soon as we have it. The misperception lies in the fact that if there is not a monthly update, we're not sharing information that we possess.

In many instances, months can go by without any significant movement. An example is AB 399, the LA County negotiated MOU issue. This bill has been in and out of legislative committees since March--the last time we reported any movement on the LACERA Web site. Currently the bill is still in the legislature, and until it is either substantively amended or signed by the Governor, there's just nothing further to report.

When we promise to let our membership know of any new developments, we are dedicated to bringing you the latest news as it happens. In cases like this, no news is just that--no news.

To follow the progress of this and other legislation, a good source of information is www.leginfo.ca.gov

MYTH: New members of the Board of Supervisors and Department Heads get Plan A retirement benefits.

TRUTH: They choose between Plan D and E just like any other new County employee. These two plans are the only retirement plans that are available to new employees at this time. Members of the Board of Supervisors, elected department heads such as the Sheriff and the Assessor, and the District Attorney can also choose not to participate at all because they are elected officials.

MYTH: When I retire from a contributory plan, I will be eligible for the STAR COLA benefit.

TRUTH: After you retire, you may eventually become eligible for the STAR COLA benefit (Plan E does not provide cost-of-living benefits). This plan is intended for those retirees and survivors who have lost more than 20% of their original benefit's purchasing power due to inflation over the years. The 2001 benefit was vested for current STAR COLA recipients, however any increase in the benefits will require Board approval.

In contrast, all retirees (except those in Plan E) are eligible for the April 1 cost-of-living benefit. This is the annual benefit increase (or decrease) in a member's monthly retirement allowance, based on the movement of the CPI (Consumer's Price Index). The maximum COLA benefit is 3% for Plan A retirees and 2% for Plans B, C, and D.

MYTH: Plan E is cheaper for the County because the County doesn't have to pay any contributions for Plan E members until they retire.

TRUTH: The County contributes to LACERA on behalf of Plan E members every month, just like all the other plans.

Plan D and Plan E cost close to the same amount for the County, but this changes with each valuation. Some years, Plan D costs more and sometimes Plan E costs more. The big difference is member contributions. Under Plan E, the member pays nothing and under Plan D the member pays almost the same as the County. For a more comprehensive explanation of the differences in retirement benefits between Plan D and Plan E, take a look at the plan brochures. The plan brochures can be requested using the toll-free member service number, 800-786-6464, or accessed through our Order Now page at www.lacera.com.

MYTH: People only live 2 or 3 years after retirement.

TRUTH: If you're expecting to live only a few years after you retire, you'd better rethink your money plan. Ten percent of LACERA members are octogenarians, and this number is rising every year. With improvements in health care, odds are you're going to be around a lot longer than you think. And this means more time to golf, visit with family--even begin a new career after retiring from the County. Don't think of retirement as the end of your career. Think of it as a new beginning, a time to reassess your goals and take advantage of your newfound freedom.

POSTSCRIPT - HOW OLD ARE YOU?

How Old Are You… Really?

Don't be shy with LACERA about your age. Telling a little white lie when you become a member of LACERA **could potentially create problems later with your retirement benefits.**

We often receive requests from members who previously submitted incorrect dates of birth and now wish to correct them. But it's not as simple as switching a few numbers around. If you were actually older than you claimed when you became a LACERA member, your retirement contributions should have been calculated at a higher rate. And that means that your retirement contributions would be underpaid. The amount due can range from a few hundred dollars to several thousand dollars. Failure to pay the underpaid contributions would make you ineligible to retire. Then again, if you claimed you were *older* than you actually were when hired, you may be eligible for a contribution refund.

So if you fudged your date of birth on your LACERA records, let us know as soon as possible. You may owe more than you think you do for retirement contributions, thus putting off your retirement eligibility - or you may be eligible for a refund.

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NEW LAWS

Legislative Updates

The following bills have been signed by the Governor with an effective date of January 1, 2002, unless otherwise indicated.

AB 1214 Plan E Social Security Offset (Chavez)

This bill allows all Plan E members who have coverage under Social Security while working with the County to have their actual Social Security benefit amount used in calculating the Social Security pension offset. Currently, only those members who retire after age 65 may do so with all others required to use an estimated Social Security benefit amount. Additionally, the bill allows a Plan E member who has coverage under Social Security while working for the County, but is not vested with 40 quarters under the Social Security system at the time of retirement, to have no Social Security pension offset applied to their retirement benefit. However, if they become eligible for Social Security benefits in the future, LACERA will apply the pension offset at that time.

AB 1665 County Retirement Boards: Alternate Members (Ashburn)

Existing law provides that our Board of Retirement consists of nine members, including one elected retired member and one elected alternate safety member. However, the Board of Retirement in the Counties of Ventura and Kern are authorized to appoint, and the retired members of those counties may subsequently elect, an alternate retired member in specified circumstances.

This bill would authorize the remaining CERL county retirement systems to establish a system whereby the retired members of the county could elect an alternate retired member to represent them on the board whenever a retired member was absent.

This bill will become effective in LA County if, after January 1, 2002, the Board of Retirement votes to appoint an alternate retired member. An alternate retired member appointed by the Board of Retirement would serve until the regular retired member's term expired. Thereafter, the alternate retired member would be elected under procedures adopted by the Board of Supervisors.

SB 304 LA County Only, Mandatory Retirement (Karnette)

The 1937 Act current law allows counties to require that certain safety members retire at age 60 or 70. This bill applies only to Los Angeles County and allows the Board of Supervisors in that county to disregard that mandatory requirement provision for an Assistant Sheriff or Chief in a sheriff's office who is a safety member, and whose duties are primarily administrative.

SB 304 was an urgency bill that became effective when the Governor signed it on July 3, 2001. The Board of Supervisors' resolution of July 17, 2001 made it effective in LA County.

PENDING LAWS

The following legislation for 2001 is still pending:

AB 616 3% at Age 60 Formula for General Members (Calderone)

Bill status: Senate Appropriations Committee Suspense File
LACERA's position: Watch
This bill authorizes the Board of Supervisors to approve a 3% at 60 formula for general members. The July 2amendment would add two sections: the first section would provide for the calculation of contribution rates. The second section would provide, at the option of the Board of Supervisors, either (1) the retirement allowance to be integrated with social security, or (2) social security to be on an additive or supplemental basis at the option of the Board of Supervisors.

AB 1190 Expanding Reciprocity Rights (Papan)

Bill status: Assembly Banking & Finance Committee
LACERA's position: Watch
This is a two-year bill that would greatly expand reciprocity rights by allowing members to establish reciprocity regardless of the time period between terminating employment with one agency and starting at the next agency. Currently the law requires that a member transfer between agencies within 6 months.

SB 361 Blood-Borne Infectious Disease (Soto)

Bill status: Assembly inactive file
LACERA's position: Support if amended to require on-the-job exposure to blood or blood products. This bill is a blood-borne infectious disease presumption for health care workers and unspecified others. LACERA supports this bill provided it is amended to require on-the-job exposure.

The following bills are seeking safety membership benefits for various peace officer, park ranger, and prosecutor groups as specified in each bill:

SB 695 (Karnette) Safety Membership for Peace Officers

Bill status: Assembly Appropriations Committee
LACERA's position: Watch

SB 1215 (Romero) Safety Membership for Safety Police Officers and Park Rangers

Bill status: (Formerly AB 1385) Assembly Inactive File
LACERA's position: Watch

SB 1018 (Perata) Safety Membership for Local Prosecutors and Public Defenders

Bill status: Assembly Appropriations Committee
LACERA's position: Oppose

AB 1254 (Florez) Safety membership for Local Prosecutors

Bill status: Assembly PERS & SS Committee
LACERA's position: Oppose

PENDING LEGISLATION

The following legislation for 2001 is still pending:

AB 1071 COLA Accumulation (COLA "Bank") (Canciamilla)

Bill status: Assembly unfinished business
LACERA's position: Watch
This bill allows the historic amounts added to the COLA Accumulation to be increased or decreased for the current year's inflation. For example, if a Plan D member retires during a year with 6% inflation, the member will receive a 2% COLA award with 4% being added to their COLA Accumulation. In the following year inflation reaches 12%. The member will receive a 2% COLA award with 10% being added to their COLA Accumulation. Under current law the member's COLA Accumulation will be 14%, that is 4% from year #1 and 10% from year #2. However, under this new bill, the calculation is figured differently. The COLA Accumulation from year #1 (4%) is adjusted by year #2's 12% inflation, which is then added to the remaining 10% from year #2. Applying this formula, the COLA Accumulation would be 14.5%. Here are the calculation examples.

Current Process:

	CPI Change	Cost-of-Living	COLA Accumulation	COLA Balance
Year 1 Plan D:	6%	2%	4%	4%
Year 2 Plan D:	12%	2%	10%	14%

Year 2 formula: Yr. 1 Bal (4%) + Yr. 2 Accum. (10%) = Yr. 2 Bal. (14%)

New Process:

	CPI Change	Cost-of-Living	COLA Accumulation	COLA Balance
Year 1 Plan D:	6%	2%	4%	4%
Year 2 Plan D:	12%	2%	10%	14.5%

Year 2 formula: Yr. 1 Bal (4%) x Yr. 2 CPI (12%) + Yr. 2 Accum. (10%) = Yr. 2 Bal. (14.5%)
[.04 x (1 + .12)] + .10 = .1448 or 14.5%

This bill, if passed, would require Board of Supervisors adoption, at which time it would be applied to accumulations of retired members retroactively to the member's date of retirement.

For more information, or to follow the progress of pending legislation, please visit the Official California Legislative Information Web site at www.leginfo.ca.gov

MOU´s - Special Update

MOU 399

Many LACERA members have expressed concern that the MOU 399 bill does not seem to be moving forward. Since our last update in March, nothing new has developed with this bill, and presently it is being reviewed in the Legislature. For up-to-the-minute legislative updates, try checking out www.leginfo.ca.gov, a great resource to find out the latest legislative developments.

SB 670 Survey

As you may remember, LACERA recently conducted a plan benefit survey of retired and active members regarding marital statistics. The survey results are being reviewed and analyzed by an actuary. Once this actuarial study has been completed, we'll pass the results on to the LACERA membership

Correction to Plan E Lawsuit Article

In the last *PostScript*, we ran an update on the status of the lawsuit brought against the County and LACERA by about 815 Plan E members. At one point in the article, the proceeding was incorrectly referred to as a "class action." In fact, the case is not a class action, but a **"representative action."**

The difference is that in a representative action, an individual must take more affirmative steps to consent to and become a member of the group, which is then represented by one individual or entity. (In the Plan E case, the plaintiff representative is CEFRP, County Employees For Fair Retirement Plans.) In a class action, while there is still a named representative of the group, persons may be included as members of a plaintiff or defendant class whether they wish to be included or not. Many of the procedural rules regarding standing of the named representative, however, may be similar. We apologize for any confusion this misstatement may have caused.

With regard to the status of the case, which is now on appeal on the issue of standing, CEFRP's Opening Brief is due on September 20, 2001. (The standing issue involves whether CEFRP may appropriately represent the 815 individuals in one action, or whether the individual cases must be pursued separately.)

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Thank you, Senator Karnette!

Thanks to Senator Betty Karnette, Senate Bill 1132 has been signed into law by the Governor. This bill is important to LACERA for many reasons, the most important being the competent and successful management of our $28 billion fund for you, our members.

SB 1132 allows LACERA to hire certain employees not subject to civil service or merit system rules. The current retirement law allows LACERA to appoint a CEO who is not subject to the county's civil service or merit system rules. The CEO appointed through these provisions serves at the pleasure of the Board of Retirement and the Board of Investments, and can be dismissed without specific charges, a statement of reasons, or good cause.

The Chief Deputies and assistants in each county agency and department are no longer subject to the county's civil service or merit system due to a charter amendment adopted by the voters of Los Angeles County last year. But LACERA was not included in that charter amendment due to LACERA's independence. Therefore, LACERA decided to sponsor this legislation to apply the same personnel standards to its employees.

Now that SB 1132 has passed, LACERA is up to speed with the LA County personnel standards and can appoint administrators and assistants of the retirement fund, including legal and investment officers, without being subject to the county charter, civil service or merit system rules. All such employees appointed through these provisions serve at the pleasure of the Retirement and Investment Boards, and can be dismissed without specific charges.

This bill gives LACERA the opportunity to attract the most qualified administrators to manage the retirement assets - the heart of this retirement system. This bill gives LACERA the freedom we need to be the best we can be, and we could not have done it without Senator Karnette's dedication to the future of this organization.

A native of Paducah, Kentucky, Senator Karnette has lived with her husband in Long Beach since 1952. Senator Karnette was a math teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District for 31 years before being elected to the California State Senate in 1996 to represent the 27th district. Her strong interest in transportation, campaign spending reform, job development, and streamlining government is reflected in her numerous Senate committee assignments.

Senator Karnette currently serves as a member of the Senate Rules Committee, Transportation Committee, Vice Chair of the Select Committee on the Alameda Corridor East, and is also a member of the Appropriations, Governmental Organization, Public Employment and Retirement, Education, and Banking, Commerce and International Trade Committees. In addition, Senator Karnette is a member of the State Coastal Conservancy and the California Small Business Board.

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How Legal Separation & Divorce Affect Your Retirement Benefits

It is important to be aware of how a divorce or legal separation affects your retirement benefits. Upon your death, the eligibility rules for a continuing survivor's allowance differ from the eligibility rules for health care dependent coverage. Although a legally separated spouse is eligible for a continuing survivor's allowance, that spouse does not qualify as a dependent entitled to health care coverage. Here's why:

Legal Separation

Following are the benefits available to spouses upon a legal separation:

Retirement Benefits

When you receive a judgement of legal separation, **your marital status does not change.** Upon your retirement, through a Wage and Earning Assignment Order, the court may order your legally separated spouse to receive a portion of your retirement benefits. Except in limited circumstances, upon your death, your spouse is still eligible for a continuing survivor's allowance, but not for health coverage.

Health Benefits

Under the LACERA-sponsored medical plan, a legally separated spouse is not eligible for coverage as a dependent. However, if your spouse was a covered dependent prior to the legal separation, your spouse would be eligible for COBRA coverage for a maximum of 36 months.

Divorce

Following are the benefits available to ex-spouses upon divorce:

Retirement Benefits

When you receive a final judgement of the dissolution of marriage, **your marital status changes.** Upon your retirement, your ex-spouse may be entitled to a portion of your retirement benefits. However, upon your death your ex-spouse may be eligible to receive a portion of your surviving spouse's allowance. Also keep in mind that your surviving spouse is only entitled to your retirement allowance if you were married to the surviving spouse at least one year prior to your retirement.

Health Benefits

Under the LACERA-sponsored medical plan, your ex-spouse is not entitled to coverage as a dependent. However, if you divorce after retirement and your ex-spouse was a covered dependent prior to the divorce, he or she would be eligible for COBRA coverage for a maximum of 36 months.

For more information on COBRA benefits, please refer to the Guide to Administrative Rules for LACERA Health Care Benefits, or call LACERA at 800-786-6464.

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Tentative Decision In Ventura Case

You may remember from past issues of the PostScript and articles on our web site that the 1997 Ventura Decision is still being settled in court. Here is a brief review of the major issues and an update on the progress of this case.

The original question brought before the court was, What salary should be included in pensionable salary used in calculating pension benefits? The courts ruled that effective October 1, 1997, special pay items not previously counted in calculating pension benefits were to be included as pensionable salary. LACERA published the lengthy listing of these pay items and has included the special pay in the pensionable salary since October 1, 1997.

The next issues were, Who should receive the salary adjustments? In other words, is this decision applicable only to salary earned after October 1, 1997, or is it applicable for all salary earned during an employee's career? The courts determined it is applicable to all active members' and current retirees' earned salary. But that raised another question: If retirees are entitled to salary adjustments that raise their pension benefit amount for future payments, is there an obligation to make retroactive back payments, and if so, for how many years?

The question of retroactivity, and to what date, was still undecided. On August 14, 2001 the California Superior Court issued a tentative decision regarding retroactivity by indicating support for a 3-year statute of limitations which would place the effective date back to 1994 for making the retroactive back payments. However, the final ruling regarding retroactivity has not been rendered as of this printing.

Because there are many more issues yet to be answered, it is anticipated that implementation would not occur until there is resolution of these issues and any possible appeals. The Ventura case is still subject to settlement and appeals and may take one or more years for full resolution..

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Coming to a LACERA Web Site Near You

Exciting developments are in store for the LACERA Web site, and we want to give you a peek into the future of this online resource. Interactive features will allow members to take a more active role in their own memberships, a text-only site will soon be available to members with impaired vision, and better security will add to your peace of mind. And best of all, it should all be up and running by the end of next year!

ADA Compliance

ADA (Americans with Disability Act) law requires that LACERA provide a text-only site that can be read by anyone, including those people utilizing special software for the visually impaired. Currently this text-only site is in the testing phases, but will be fully operational before the end of this year.

Click 'N Connect Coming This Fall

If you use the Web to do research, you know that you can't always find the information you need. Sometimes you just want to speak to a real person rather than spend countless hours combing through a Web site. Click 'N Connect technology is a Web-to-telephone service that will allow you to receive a free telephone call from LACERA, requested through our Web site, if you can't find information online.

If you're online and want to speak with someone in person, just click on the "Click 'N Connect" button on the site, and the MCI Worldcom Click 'N Connect "Welcome" screen will appear. Enter your phone number and what time you would like a LACERA Benefits Specialist to call you back, then click "Call Me!" to submit the request. It's that simple--and it's free! There are no hardware or software requirements necessary to use this service, so anyone who has Internet access can use it.

Click 'N Connect is just one more way LACERA is striving to bring you the best, most convenient service.

Access to Your Information Online

We've been listening to your requests, and soon they'll come true! In 2002, you'll be able to access your personal member information online.

We've done security testing from the outside and internally, and before we implement this new interactive feature, we'll be installing the most up-to-date security and firewall technology to insure that your private information stays private. Only after we can offer our members a fully secure environment will we bring interactive technology to our Web site; in this business, it's best to be safe.

Retirement Calculator Available by Fall

Of all the features soon to be available online, the retirement calculator is surely the most highly anticipated. This incredible interactive feature is a great planning tool for active members of LACERA. Whether you're just curious or are trying to figure out the most optimal time to retire, the calculator factors in the many variables that could affect your retirement allowance.

Although the calculator will not calculate an official LACERA estimate, it will use the information you enter to estimate a monthly retirement allowance.

Here's how it works:

1) You will be asked a series of questions about your age at retirement, beneficiaries, service credit, and Social Security coverage (you will not have to enter your Social Security number). If at any point you need clarification on a question, just click on the "Retirement Eligibility" link at the top of the page and additional information will appear to help you answer the calculator's questions. Once you've answered all the questions, just click the "Calculate" link.

2) You will see a summary of all the answers you gave in the questionnaire. Review this page to make sure that all of your answers were accurate. If they were, click "Calculate Your Estimate." If you want to make any changes, just click, "Make Changes."

3) If you'd like, you can print this page out for your records. It shows your estimated results for you and your beneficiaries, and also provides you with the different options you will have available. Once you leave this page and go back to LACERA's home page, all the information will be cleared from the estimate and will not be saved. This insures that only you will see the information calculated.

We are very excited about the implementation of this very helpful tool, and hope that you will find it useful in planning your retirement.

The LACERA calculator should be used only as an informal guide and will not replace or represent LACERA's official allowance calculation.