

Press Release



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Second Certified Professional Bookseller in the United States

Karen Ugarte, Bookstore & Operations Director of Tia Chucha's Centro Cultural in Sylmar, CA has achieved the distinction of Certified Professional Bookseller, only the second person in the country to do so since the start of the bookselling industry's certification program four years ago.

"I never imagined that I would have the opportunity to work with books. As a former library kid, I'm incredibly proud and grateful to work at the only bookstore in the Northeast San Fernando Valley," said Ugarte. "This certification made me feel less alone and encouraged me to continue learning, growing, and not be afraid to try new, bookish things at Tia Chucha's."

The certification process was both challenging and rewarding for Ugarte. There are four courses at the heart of the Professional Booksellers School (PBS), each 16 weeks long, that involve live classes and homework in every aspect of operating a bookstore. "I felt incredibly motivated throughout the process. The courses not only reassured me that I'm on the right track but also sparked new ideas for my team and me to explore. I took all the classes simultaneously, and, surprisingly, I found this approach helpful. The classes complemented each other and required me to dig deeper into the craft of bookselling. The opportunity to engage in open conversations with other booksellers—both instructors and peers—was invaluable."

The Professional Booksellers School (PBS) was created in 2020 to provide the first-of-its kind training in the independent bookstore world. Most independent booksellers come to their work from other industries, and while bringing varied skills and talent, they are unprepared for the intricacies and difficulties of independent bookselling.

"An independent bookseller must be well-read, a good marketer, understand the minutiae of operating a retail store, be a good leader for their team, sensitive with their customers, and manage thousands of new products that are released every Tuesday for sale," said Eileen Dengler, founder and president of the Professional Booksellers School. "As was the case with Ugarte, most are self-taught, learning each day as problems arise. That is a hard way to learn and grow your business. Through PBS, we are able to share the expertise of hundreds of years of combined instructor experience, and teach skills, introduce tools, and share systems and practices to help booksellers navigate their careers and achieve their goals more quickly and with greater success. The certification program gives them confidence, validation and recognition, which is invaluable for most bookstores who often operate in isolation from other bookselling professionals."

Ugarte has an undergraduate degree in Gender and Women's Studies and Chicana Studies, and a Master's in Social Work from California State University, Northridge (CSUN), and has used this

training to support survivors of intimate partner violence, individuals and families facing homelessness, worked with LGBTQIA+ people of all ages, and provided mental health services to children, youth, and families in the San Fernando Valley. An internship brought her to Tia Chucha's. "I was excited to match with Tia Chucha's because it aligned with my passions for art, literature, and community. I believe in the power of narrative, art, and creative expression as vital tools for community healing and care." Along with her advanced training with PBS, Ugarte also completed CABS-Minnesota Antiquarian Book Seminar as part of the Diverse Voices Fellowship.

The Professional Booksellers School is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to the higher education of independent booksellers in the United States. Through coursework in four key departments within a bookstore operation, booksellers may receive a certification in each of those disciplines. A bookseller who completes and is certified in all four key courses receives the distinction of Certified Professional Bookseller. The Professional Booksellers School provides instruction in all aspects of retail bookselling, including marketing, social media, leadership, design & displays, bookstore finances. More information can be found at

<https://www.professionalbooksellers.com>.

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