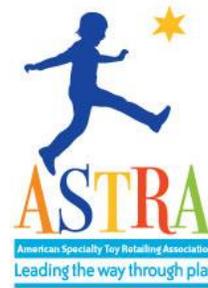


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ASTRA’s CERTIFIED PLAY EXPERT PROGRAM OPEN FOR ENROLLMENT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE AIMED AT HELPING RETAILERS SHOWCASE THEIR PLAY EXPERTISE

Chicago, IL (January 18, 2016) –The American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA) announced today that its groundbreaking *Certified Play Expert* program, a new education initiative to help professionals in the specialty toy industry strengthen their businesses, is open for enrollment.

“Owners of locally owned toy stores have long been ambassadors for healthy play, as have specialty toy manufacturers and sales representatives,” noted Kimberly Mosley, President of ASTRA. “Earning the ASTRA *Certified Play Expert* credential will deepen their knowledge about child development and the importance of play, which is the reason so many of our members are passionate about specialty toys. The program will make them what we like to call “playprofessionals”—well versed in the art and science of play.”

The program provides several hours of top-quality, research-based instruction in several core areas, including: theories of child development, characteristics of major developmental stages, play for children with disabilities, types of play and their benefits, toy safety, choosing toys and play activities, advocating for play, and making sense of play. Program participants can access the course content through convenient on-demand webinars and earn the *Certified Play Expert* credential by demonstrating their mastery of the material.

The program is targeted at store staff, toy manufacturers and sales representatives so they can better serve customers and stand out from the competition. “Parents start to trust you when you talk to them about the value of play,” said Sandi Miller, owner of The Green Alligator in Jacksonville, Florida. “The more trust they have in you, the more likely they are to come back to you.”

A committee of ASTRA members with combined experience of 80 years in the specialty toy business guided the development of ASTRA’s *Certified Play Expert* program. Faculty for the program are outside experts with in-depth experience on the core content area for which they are providing instruction. More information about the program, including enrollment details, can be found at academy.astratoy.org or by contacting Sue Warfield at swarfield@astratoy.org.

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About the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA)

With more than 1700 members, the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA) is the largest association for companies in the toy and children's products arenas. ASTRA and its member companies promote the growth of the toy industry by delivering products that serve children's best interests. For more information, visit www.astratoy.org.

Because Community Matters, ASTRA members thank you for shopping locally.

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