



**GIS MARKETING &
COMMUNICATIONS**
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

PRESS RELEASE

Date: Thursday, 19 May 2016

Contact: Catherine MacGillivray

Direct line: (345) 244-1773 Cell: 926-6110

Tel: (345) 949-8092 • Fax: (345) 949-5936

E-mail address: Catherine.Macgillivray@gov.ky

www.gis.ky • www.gazettes.gov.ky

www.twitter.com/caymangovt

www.youtube.com/user/CIGovtInfoServices

www.facebook.com/caymangovinfo

Official Government Portal: www.gov.ky

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Young Caymanians Hired for Pioneering Mosquito Project

A team of young Caymanians has been hired to work on a pioneering mosquito control project launched earlier this month.

The initiative is being rolled out by the Mosquito Research and Control Unit (MRCU) in collaboration with biotechnology company Oxitec, and aims to combat the dangerous *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which carries Zika, dengue and chikungunya.

New employees are Kenroy Millwood (23), who has a master's degree in geoscience research and a bachelor's degree in environmental science; Giselle Johnson (23), who is studying for a bachelor's degree in science; and Heidi Groves (19), who graduated from Cayman Prep and High School last year with biology as one of her top subjects.

All three are from West Bay where the new control measures will initially be rolled out and where the team is currently engaging in a community education programme about the project.

Fourth new-hire Isavella Evangelou, who is originally from Cyprus, is married to a Caymanian. She has a BSc in biological science and an MSc in molecular pathology and toxicology.

All the young people have been employed by Oxitec Cayman Ltd, but are working on the joint initiative with MRCU and are based at the research unit's office and laboratories on Red Gate Road, George Town.

"Since returning home (from school) in September, it took me eight months to find work in the science field," said Kenroy. "I feel lucky to be included on the team and I look forward to working on such a beneficial project."

Oxitec's technology produces genetically engineered non-biting male mosquitos that breed with the disease-transmitting *Aedes aegypti* females. This, in turn, means that offspring inherit a gene which causes them to die before reaching adulthood, ensuring that they do not reproduce.

"I was interested in this particular job because it was science-related and because of what Oxitec is doing," said Giselle. "Their goal of reducing the population of the primary vector that spreads

Zika, chikungunya and dengue disease caught my attention. I wanted to be part of a company making a difference in the world via science and I am happy to be working with them.”

Heidi had also been searching for a science-related job since leaving school, and Isabella wants to work in the field of biology to learn more about mosquito-borne diseases and how they spread.

Director of MRCU Dr. Bill Petrie, praised the four new employees for their work so far, describing them as bright, enthusiastic and courteous.

“It is very gratifying to see that Oxitec has been able to employ local young people for this collaborative project,” he said. “They are working alongside MRCU staff in our offices, laboratories and out in the field.”

The community engagement segment of the initiative will be ongoing throughout the next couple of weeks, with the first modified mosquitoes expected to be released in selected areas of West Bay in June.

“We are very happy to have local Caymanians working on this pioneering mosquito control technique,” said Oxitec’s on-island project manager Dr. Renaud Lacroix. “Not only is this giving employment opportunities in the field of science but the end results of controlling the dangerous *Aedes aegypti* mosquito will benefit everybody in the Cayman Islands.”

Sidebar

For the past year, United Kingdom (UK)-based Oxitec has been working on a similar mosquito control initiative in Brazil where large numbers of people are affected by the Zika virus which is linked to microcephaly, a condition causing birth defects. Zika is also now being investigated for links to other serious medical conditions such as Guillain-Barré Syndrome in which a person’s own immune system attacks the body’s nerves and can cause total paralysis.

In February, the unprecedented spread of Zika prompted the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it an international public health emergency. Then, in March, WHO recommended implementation of Oxitec’s solution to control the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, as part of the global response to the Zika crisis.

MRCU and Oxitec previously carried out trials using genetically engineered mosquitoes in East End, successfully reducing the *Aedes aegypti* population by 96 per cent.



Isavella Evangelou, Heidi Groves, Giselle Johnson and Kenroy Millwood at work in the MRCU offices.

(GIS)

For the official Cayman Islands Government web portal, www.gov.ky:

Web title: Oxitec Hires Young Caymanians

Web blurb: Local team will work on pioneering project to control dangerous *Aedes aegypti* mosquito.



Kenroy Millwood, Isavella Evangelou, Heidi Groves and Giselle Johnson. Isavella has her hand in meshed box containing mosquitoes to demonstrate they don't bite.