



Eight of the most promising science students in the Territory's high schools took part in the STEP-UP (Short-Term Research Experience for Underrepresented Persons) High School Summer Research Symposium hosted earlier this month by ASCC-CNR. (L-r): Hyun-Duck Oh, Johann Vollrath, Jacob Van der Ryn, Inny Mareko, Darlene Meli, Taufagalupe Ve'e, Louisa Crawley and Nora Toalepai. [Photo: J. Kneubuhl]

ASCC-CNR hosting STEP-UP student Science Symposium

By James Kneubuhl, ASCC Press Officer

Earlier this month, eight of the Territory's most promising high school Science students showcased their individual projects during the STEP-UP High School Summer Research Symposium, held at the Community and Natural Resources (CNR) division of the American Samoa Community College (ASCC).

The students had spent the previous eight weeks working with mentors at ASCC-CNR and other local agencies on self-designed projects focused on health and environmental issues. During the symposium, each student gave a 10 minute presentation on his/her research before an audience of professionals, family and friends, and answered questions before receiving their certificates of completion and stipends for participating.

The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) sponsors STEP-UP, which stands for Short-Term Research Experience for Underrepresented Persons. The program is coordinated in the Pacific region by the University of Hawaii and locally by the American Samoa Department of Education with assistance from ASCC-CNR.

Given the Territory's urgent need for health and science professionals who can help develop locally appropriate solutions to health and environmental challenges, STEP-UP aims to provide students with hands-on research opportunities, with the long-term goal of increasing the number of American Samoans embarking on careers in the biomedical sciences.

Now in its seventh year in American Samoa, to date a total of 43 students have participated in the STEP-UP program. Each year, student applications from American Samoa's public and private high schools are reviewed by a committee comprising representatives of the NIDDK and the University of Hawaii. Selected students are assigned to work with a local scientist mentor at ASCC-CNR or another agency.

This summer's eight participating students were Mr. Inny Mareko, Miss Nora Toalepai and Miss Taufagalupe Ve'e from Faga'itua High School; Miss Louisa Crawley, Miss Darlene Meli, Mr. Jacob Van der Ryn, and Mr. Johann Vollrath from Taufna High School; and Mr. Hyun-Duck Oh of South Pacific Academy.

Miss Crawley, who worked with mentor Dr. Mark Schmaedick of ASCC-CNR, presented on her project titled Comparison of Three Mosquito Traps for Lymphatic Filariasis Molecular Xeno-

monitoring in American Samoa Villages; Mr. Mareko's project was Sodium Chloride Affects Growth of Taro, under the mentorship of Mr. Ian Gurr of ASCC-CNR; Miss Meli, under mentor Dr. Ndeme Atibalentja of ASCC-CNR, also focused on taro in her project Survey of Virus Diseases of Taro on Aunu'u; Mr. Oh, also mentored by Dr. Schmaedick, chose the topic Attractiveness of Three Gravid Trap Infusions for Ovipositing Polynesian Tiger Mosquitoes; Miss Toalepai, also mentored by Dr. Atibalentja, focused on Molecular Diagnosis of the Causal Agent of the Root and Crown Rot of Taro in Aunu'u; Mr. Van der Ryn, co-mentored by Mia Theresa Comeros and Ioane Tomanogi of the American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency, researched Reducing Solid Waste Quantities Headed for the Landfill in Futiga; Miss Ve'e, also mentored by Ms. Comeros, spoke on Marine Pollution Prevention in American Samoa; and Mr. Vollrath, mentored by Dr. Timothy Clark of the National Park of American Samoa, presented on the Distribution of Crown of Thorns Outbreaks along the North Shore of Tutuila.

For the symposium, ASCC-CNR Dean and Director Tapa'au Dr. Daniel Mageo Aga welcomed guests from off-island Dr. George Hui, Professor at the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine and Program Director of Pacific STEP-UP; Ms. Jennifer Curry, Program Specialist, Office of Minority Health Research Coordination, NIDDK, NIH; and Ms. Danielle Clements, also of the John A. Burns School of Medicine and Program Coordinator, Pacific STEP-UP.

ASDOE Deputy Director Mr. Philo Jennings gave the Introduction for the program, and Ms. Magdalene Augafa-Leauanae of ASDOE, along with Dr. Schmaedick, served as co-moderators. Ms. Netini Sene, DOE Health and Science coordinator, also attended, along with mentors Dr. Clark, Ms. Comeros and Mr. Gurr.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Hui expressed his pride in the progress made by STEP-UP in American Samoa over the past seven years. He also explained that 2016 will be the final year of the current funding cycle for the STEP-UP program. While efforts will be made to continue STEP-UP, this will be subject to federal approval.

Local students interested in applying for an internship for summer 2016 can find more information at: [HYPERLINK "http://stepup.niddk.nih.gov"](http://stepup.niddk.nih.gov) or ["http://stepup.niddk.nih.gov"](http://stepup.niddk.nih.gov) <http://stepup.niddk.nih.gov> and <http://stepup.jabsom.hawaii.edu>.

NEWS IN BRIEF...

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DUI SUSPECT ARRESTED AFTER 30-MILE SLOW-SPEED CHASE

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The California Highway Patrol says a drunken driving suspect was arrested after leading Los Angeles police and CHP officers on a slow-speed chase that covered about 30 miles over two highways and several surface streets.

CHP Officer Francisco Villalobos says LAPD officers began the pursuit shortly after 10 p.m. Sunday on northbound Interstate 405 in the Van Nuys area.

The driver eventually exited the highway and then moved to the northbound Interstate 5. The CHP took over when the suspect exited and got back on the southbound I-5 near Santa Clarita. Villalobos tells City News Service the man drove no faster than about 45 mph. He was eventually taken into custody without incident near Arleta around 10:40 p.m. and booked on suspicion of evading officers and other crimes. His name was not released.

SPANISH POLICE FLY TO CORSICA TO RETRIEVE PICASSO WORK

MADRID (AP) — Spanish police say they have sent a team of experts to the French island of Corsica to retrieve a Picasso painting owned by a Spanish banker. Authorities in Spain say the 1906 painting — "Head of a Young Woman" — is a national treasure and could not be taken out of the country.

A spokesman for Spain's Civil Guard said four police experts in national heritage and several Culture Ministry officials flew early Tuesday to recuperate the painting that is valued at 24 million euros (\$26 million). The officer said they expect to return with the painting later Tuesday. He was speaking on condition of anonymity in keeping with police regulations. The painting, owned by Jaime Botin, was seized by French police off a boat in late-July.

TURKISH WARPLANES STRIKE PKK TARGETS IN SOUTHEAST

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Turkey's military says warplanes have struck Kurdish rebels positions in southeast Turkey following a day of heavy violence in the country, which left at least nine dead. In a statement Tuesday, the Turkish military said jets overnight hit 17 targets of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, around the Buzul mountain and the Ikiyaka region in Hakkari province, which borders Iran and Iraq.

On Monday, nine people, including five police officers, were killed in separate attacks in Istanbul and in the southeastern Sirmak province, including an overnight bomb attack at a police station. The attacks were blamed on the PKK.

POLICE: MAN IN CLOWN COSTUME SWINGS AX AT WOMAN

HICKORY, N.C. (AP) — Police say a man wearing a clown costume swung an ax at a woman, but she wasn't hit.

Authorities say the man came to the woman's house about 4:30 a.m. Friday wearing a clown mask and a multicolored wig.

Authorities told the Hickory Daily Record that the man didn't hurt the woman, and she was able to remove his mask and recognized him as an acquaintance before he left. Authorities say the woman decided to go to a judge and request an arrest warrant after talking to officers. Police have not released the suspect's name.

A motive for the attack was not immediately clear.

CHINA'S CURRENCY SLIDES AFTER BEIJING ANNOUNCES DEVALUATION

BEIJING (AP) — China devalued its tightly controlled currency Tuesday following a slump in trade, allowing the yuan's biggest one-day decline in a decade. The central bank said the yuan's fall was due to reforms aimed at making its exchange rate system more market-oriented. Sustained weakness in the yuan raises the risk of tensions with China's trading partners.

China's move makes it the third major economy to take actions that weakened their currencies. Initiatives by Japan and the European Union over the past two years depressed the yen and euro. But analysts cautioned against seeing the change as a direct effort to help Chinese exporters. The yuan had strengthened along with the dollar, hurting exporters and raising the risk of politically dangerous job losses in manufacturing industries that employ tens of millions of workers. July exports fell by an unexpectedly large margin of 8.3 percent from a year earlier, according to data released on the weekend.

Tuesday's move "signals a new government willingness" to let the currency decline, said USB economist Tao Wang in a report.

MAN ACCUSED OF 2ND JAIL CRASH, PREVIOUSLY HITTING FLAGPOLE

SPRING HILL, Fla. (AP) — Authorities say a man is back in a Florida jail for crashing his SUV into the building's entrance and causing a gas leak — two weeks after doing doughnuts in the facility's lawn and hitting a flag pole.

The Hernando County Sheriff's Office reports that 31-year-old Michael Lee Roberts made a quick trip to the hospital after Sunday morning's crash before being returned to the jail that afternoon as an inmate. Technicians had the leak stopped within hours.

Roberts was arrested on an active felony warrant, accused of discharging a firearm from a vehicle. He also was charged with three counts of threatening to harm a public servant and two counts of felony criminal mischief.

Authorities say Roberts crashed his SUV into the jail's flagpole July 27 after workers told him he couldn't park on a sidewalk.

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