

UNDER THE SLOGAN "ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY" THE MOLECULAR CENTER HELD AN OPEN HOUSE ^[1]

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In celebration of Bioscience, the Center for Research on Molecular Sciences (CICiM) recently held an Open House, under the theme of Environmental Sustainability.

Young people from high school to elementary school enjoyed VIP tours, interactive tables, a talk that integrated professors and student researchers on environmental issues, and the show 'The Magic of Chemistry'.

The students were able to see hands-on demonstrations on various aspects of science and get a glimpse into the research being conducted by scientists at the Center for Materials Characterization (MCC), the Facility for Neuroimaging and Electrophysiology (NIEF), the UPR X-Ray diffraction facility and the COBRE project, which is a Center for Neuroplasticity.

Also, the students visited the Tropical Biodiversity Center, where they learned about the capabilities of natural products such as plants; the Crystallization Design Institute, witnessing the growth of a crystal; and the Genome Sequencing Facility, where they were able to observe the dissection of a larva of the zebra butterfly or *Heliconius charithonia*.

"At this Open House, more than 100 students along with their teachers, had the opportunity to see the high level of science being done in Puerto Rico, discover the technology and scientific

instrumentation used in research, and share up close with researchers, professors and students of natural sciences. The staff of 'El Molecular' led the students on a tour that went beyond the planned visit to the facilities; it was a journey in which the scientists shared their experiences and those first steps they took to reach their current profession," said Dr. Eduardo Nicolau, executive director of CICI-M.

The lecture 'Nanomaterials for a Sustainable World' featured Dr. Chun-Long Chen, researcher at Pacific Northwest National Lab and director of a collaborative project of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) with the UPR; Dr. Keyla Soto, professor at the UPR; and Dr. Chun-Long Chen, professor at the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) with the UPR. Keyla Soto, professor at the University of Puerto Rico High School, who works on the decontamination of heavy metals using nanomaterials and plants; as well as Dinorah Martínez, doctoral student majoring in analytical chemistry, and Kimberly Meléndez, undergraduate chemistry student, both from the School of Natural Sciences at UPR-Río Piedras.

The discussion was moderated by Dr. Marvin Bayro, professor of chemistry-physics at UPR-Río Piedras and co-director of the DOE collaborative project with Dr. Chen.

Dr. Bayro and Dr. Pearl Akamine, of the Bioreagent Clinical Center, served as event coordinators. For her part, Akamine shared that for this Open House they chose the topic of environmental sustainability, "because it is a timely topic, for which we have to act now in order to mitigate the effects of climate change, and raise the issue among us and our visitors."

Among the hands-on science activities were 'Strawberry DNA extraction' (Biophysical Society), 'From polymers to membranes' (Dr. Nicolau's lab), 'Color in Chemistry' (Dr. Bayro's lab), 'Soil and water remediation' (CIRE2N), 'The chemistry behind medicine' (Dr. Vlaar's lab), 'Let's sow' and 'Kool-Aid Chromatography' (Bridge to PhD).

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