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Whitehall man employs region's first mold-sniffing dog

By STACY LEE
For The Corridor

Paul Hewitt works with his dog Kody on a daily basis, yet Hewitt's not a dog trainer or police officer. He's a mold detection specialist and the 2-½-year-old female beagle is an essential tool in his job.

Kody is Pittsburgh's first mold detection canine, and she's sent into structures or areas to find mold. The team works for K9 Mold Service, a company that is based out of Hewitt's Whitehall home and owned by Hewitt's girlfriend Susan Weis.

"This is the only mold-detection dog in the tri-state area," Hewitt said. "This is a whole new concept in mold detection."

Hewitt said the service Kody provides actually can save customers money in the

long run.

"I don't know how much you know about mold detection," he said, but explained generally two air samples are taken from each room — at a cost that could reach \$100 per sample. In a five-room home, that could cost \$1,000.

By pinpointing only rooms or areas that contain mold, Kody helps customers avoid expensive air samplings in areas that are mold free.

Hewitt said many remediation companies need to tear up walls to find mold, when Kody, through extensive training, can simply smell it.

Kody knows when it's time to work, because that is the only time Hewitt puts on her collar.

On a normal business call, Hewitt first examines the out-

side, then the inside of the area suspected of containing mold. He said he takes photos and looks for visible mold. Hewitt also looks for common places where water may have intruded, such as sinks or windows.

Hewitt then will bring Kody in and walk her along the walls as he says, "show me" or "find it." When Kody finds mold, she points with her nose and sits. As a reward, Kody gets a handful of kibbles.

The area with mold then is marked, and air samples are taken.

Hewitt will give the owners a report and the name of restoration companies. He offers to send the companies a report.

Hewitt said he had heard of the mold dog concept when

he worked for a water restoration company and thought it might be useful. He and Weis talked about it for awhile and pitched the idea to home restoration company representatives, who were enthusiastic about it. The couple then

decided to purchase Kody from the Florida Canine Academy in Safety Harbor, Fla.

The couple contacted Bill Whitstine, academy owner and master trainer, who also
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Dog

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owns the Mold Dog subsidiary. Whitstine trains, certifies and sells mold-detecting dogs. He also trains dogs to detect drugs, bombs, arson, bedbugs, termites and green sea turtle eggs.

Hewitt said Whitstine asked what breed he wanted, stating any breed is able to be trained. Hewitt said he chose a beagle because of its good behavior and low-key personality. Kody was rescued from a Clearwater, Fla., shelter as Whitstine exclusively uses rescue dogs.

"We went to Florida for approximately 60 hours of training," Hewitt said. "Kody had approximately 1,000 hours of training before we got there."

The couple brought Kody to Whitehall in April and opened K9 Mold Service on May 1. Hewitt said he gets equal work from restoration companies and private homes.

Hewitt said Kody's training is maintained as she has to find mold before she eats.

When they're not working, he'll hide a bag of mold and the canine has to find it.

Originally, Hewitt trained Kody with moldy items including a Florida phone book, cardboard box, piece of wall from a residence in McKeesport and a cultured sample of mold.

"She's tested quarterly for accuracy," Hewitt said. "Whitstine sends up cans and she has to find what can the mold is in."

Hewitt said mold can cause health issues, especially for someone who has asthma.

When Kody isn't working, she spends time at home with Hewitt and Weis, along with their three cats.

Hours of operation vary, depending on when the team is needed. K9 Mold Service charges \$265 to screen an entire house. There is a three-room minimum, which is \$185.

For more information on K9 Mold Service, call 412-735-4438 or visit www.k9moldservice.com.



— Photo by Jennifer R. Vertullo

Kody points and sits when she finds mold in an area.