



KODY ALERTS her owner, Susan Weis, to a bag filled with mold. The 3-year-old beagle is trained to sniff out moldy spots in homes and businesses.

Photo by Tom McGee

A NOSE FOR MOLD

Beagle puts his unique skill to work

By Tom McGee

Staff writer

Kody knows there's something wrong with the cat toys.

The 3-year-old beagle kneels down at the basket and starts swatting her nose against it, meaning her owner, Sue Weiss, should investigate further.

She doesn't have a problem with the cats; it's the planted bag of mold that drew Kody's nose to the spot.

Kody is trained to detect mold spots in buildings. Her owners, Weiss and Paul Hewitt, put that skill to use as part of the Pleasant Hills-based company K9 Mold Service.

Kody can detect 18 varieties of mold and pick out specific spots in rooms where it might be forming.

"She's looking for that," Weiss says. "Not the scent of wood or dry wall."

The couple and Kody work as independent investigators for cleaning businesses.

Before Kody began her career as a

mold sniffer, she was living a much different life in a Clearwater kennel. She had spent most of her life there after being abandoned by her original owners.

After three months of training at the Florida Canine Academy, she was ready to begin her career after the couple adopted her last year.

In Florida, Kody's skills were in use all year. In Pennsylvania, Weiss and Hewitt have to keep her nose strong during the colder months. Hewitt says they haven't had a call since November.

"I think here, up north, when it's 10 degrees out, people aren't worried about their mold," Weiss says.

Every day, Weiss or Hewitt give Kody a workout to make sure she'll be ready for a full workload in the spring and summer.

Around their home, Weiss has bags of moldy items planted in various rooms. Weiss takes Kody around the home to detect each bag. Whenever

she finds one, Kody sits in front of it and moves her head to signal a moldy spot.

A dog's ability to focus on one scent makes it easy for Kody to detect patches of mold, Weiss says. She compares it to smelling a cake being made.

"A dog smells the eggs, flour and all the ingredients," Weiss says.

One of Kody's greatest successes came during cleanup from flooding at the Aliquippa Library. The library staff knew parts of the building had been damaged, and they also learned that several of the older books were infected with mold.

Weiss says Kody was given a newer book and a moldy book to sniff.

"She hit on the old book every time," she says.

During the cleanup of a nursing home in Greensburg, Kody was able to find places where mold had spread.

A sprinkler broke and while

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A nose for mold

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employees knew several rooms had been hit, Kody found others where mold was growing.

Weiss says sniffing out tough spots like those is what Kody does best.

"She's finding the mold you don't see," she says.

Finding those hidden spots of mold can save the homeowner time and money when it is time for repairs. An air sample test can verify Kody's results, but each one can cost up to \$100 per room. Her ability to narrow down trouble spots can cut down on the cost to fix the problem.

"If she didn't alert, I'm not going to waste the customer's money," Weiss says.

Four times a year, Kody is certified by the academy to guarantee that her nose is still strong. "She's a tool for us," Weiss says.

But her place in the family is not all business. She also fits in nicely with the couple's three cats at their home.

"If we didn't tell people she was a mold dog, they wouldn't know," Weiss says.