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GUIDE TO FINANCE



## The Nose Knows

### Man's Best Friend Sniffs Out Mold

**N**othing stops Oreo when she is on the job. And she doesn't expect money in return for her hard work; a hearty meal will do.

The one-year-old Labrador mix has a nose for mold. When her razor-sharp senses smell mold, Oreo sits. And when her handler says, "Show me," she points to the source with her nose or paw.

Oreo is one of the country's 35 mold-detecting dogs trained at Mold Dog, a subsidiary of the Florida Canine Academy in Tampa, which trains canine detection teams to spot bomb, drugs, money, weapons, and termites. Five years ago, All State Insurance Co. and State Farm Insurance called Bill Whitstine, owner of the academy, inquiring if dogs could help in the billion-dollar battle against mold.

Whitstine did his homework and discovered that mold-detection dogs have been used in Europe for more than 15 years. Whitstine rescued dogs from the

Humane Society of North Pinellas in Clearwater, Fla. and began training them. He sold the first Mold Dog last year for about \$12,500.

Traditional tools, such as taking five to six air samples per room, can't pinpoint the exact location of mold. "Until Mold Dog, the customer would pay significant sums of money for partial answers like, 'Here is the identification of visible mold; it may or may not be all the mold in the house,'" says Bob Lanier, a principal at MouldWorks LLC, a Portland, Ore.-based mold identification lab. "Mold Dog owners have the skills to answer all of these questions—Is there invisible mold? Where is it? What is it?," he says. Dogs can smell mold through walls, ceilings, or floors.

Even high-tech gadgets such as electronic moisture detection and infrared thermal scanning can't pinpoint mold, says Jason Earle, handler of Oreo and owner of Lab Results LLC, a Princeton, N.J.-based indoor air quality improvement company. Oreo reduces the area of remediation to the smallest possible dimensions and lowers costs, he says.

But it's important to remember that Mold Dogs are only one tool in the toolbox, he adds. After Oreo discovers mold, the company

Copper, left, a Mold Dog at Sun State Specialty K-9, refreshes his skills by sniffing samples to find which one contains mold. Watson, above, uses his expertise to pinpoint where mold is hiding.

uses other tools to complete the remediation process.

It isn't easy for a dog to become a certified Mold Dog. They undergo between 800 to 1,000 hours of initial training. Effective breeds include Labs, Border collies, Jack Russell terriers, and beagles; mutts also are welcome. Above all, dogs should be friendly and energetic with plenty of drive. "If they were your children, you'd have them on Ritalin three times a day," says Hank Nolin, president of Sun State Specialty K-9, a Daytona Beach, Fla.-based canine service with two Mold Dogs. And the dogs must always be at the top of their game. The academy requires quarterly testing and annual recertification.

Working hard is no problem for Watson, a 20-pound fox terrier, says his owner Tony McFarland of Mold Masters Inc., an Anoka, Minn.-based remediation company. Watson, whose services cost \$295 per inspection plus \$65 per hour for the handler, hunts for mold even after he is rewarded. "When he gets to the jobsite, he gets excited and really wants to work," McFarland says.

Watson will have plenty to keep him busy as the demand for Mold Dogs grows. A healthy employment rate is good news for dogs. "They have a great life," says Whitstine. "It's a Cinderella story from doggie death row to mold detective."—Rachel Zoberman

**GOT NEWS?** Contact Rachel Zoberman, assistant editor, at [rzoberman@hanley-wood.com](mailto:rzoberman@hanley-wood.com)