

October 17, 2005

Inspector Kody was dumped at a pound

Inspector Kody was dumped at a pound and was slated for an unhappy end until his termite-detecting ability saved him by a nose

By Thane Burnett

At the beginning of his tail, he was considered an unwanted pest.

Something to be driven out of someone's home.

But now, Inspector Kody, a 2-year-old Shepherd mix, has gone from abandoned pup to one of the nation's, well, top dogs -- a canine with an exceptional ability to find creepy invaders who are launching a terrifying return to civilization.

Kody is Canada's first specially trained termite-detecting dog -- a higher education that has cost close to \$15,000.

He's also one of only two pooches in the world apparently able to go undercover to sniff out blood-sucking bedbugs.

You wouldn't think this kind of skin-crawling detective work -- far from the more glamorous, but now common, bomb- and drug-sniffing accomplishments of his cousins -- would make him so popular.

But Kody has become a breed apart -- a four-legged celebrity, of sorts -- even among some Toronto school kids.

His hockey-style picture card -- given out when his handler, Michael Goldman, takes him on school visits to demonstrate the science of a dog's nose -- are grabbed up like those of the latest Leaf forward.

Quite a dog's day, when you consider he was due to die as a pup. When Dakota -- Kody, as he's called -- was only 3 months old, his original owner carried him off to a Thornhill pound to face being put down.

He was called "Ricky" back then, and no one seems to know why he was given up for dead.

Pests make comeback

But fate gave him paws. He was instead adopted by Goldman, who thought he might have the good scents to go where few dogs have gone before. On the trail of some of the worst kinds of home invaders.

After a 40-year lull, bedbugs -- thanks to increased travel and pesticides that are no longer effective -- are making a comeback.

This month, Italy's state railway pulled 508 train cars out of circulation because of the biting critters that feed at night.

Earlier this week, a Virginia motel was served with a \$100,000 lawsuit stemming from an alleged bedbug incident -- the latest in a series of such actions.

And in Toronto, local exterminators report they are getting daily calls about bedbug infestations -- a bug largely eradicated in North America after World War II.

But the bloodsuckers are back. And they're not alone.

While most parts of Canada are too cold for termites, Toronto is within reach of the the subterranean terrors. Possibly because of a change in climate, they're being found in increasing numbers in outlying areas, such as Newmarket, Oshawa and Aurora.

So whistle for man's best friend, and a bug's worst enemy.

"I've been doing this for the past 27 years, and I'm 35% accurate," said Purity Pest Control expert Goldman, standing on the porch of a home in the Beaches -- Kody sniffing cool morning air. "(Kody), on the other hand, is 95% accurate."

Kody can whiff out bugs embedded behind walls and deep into wood. He can smell them in a ceiling, far above his head. Even underground.

But then, a dog's nose is so sensitive, it can detect a drop of lemon juice in a swimming pool. Or a creepy-crawler in this beautiful old house, which looks fine to a naked eye.

"We've heard the neighbourhood is prone to termites, and just want to be sure," says the owner, holding her little girl in her arms as Kody begins his search.

She and her husband recently bought it as their first home. They fell in love with the worn floors and the deep, rich wood that decorates everything from the staircase to an old fireplace mantle.

But then, termites have also apparently moved into it for the same reasons.

Within seconds of entering the living room, Kody is picking up the scent of termites at work. He sits down beside a beam, which runs down into the basement. Then, he sits again, beside an electrical receptacle. And another door frame.

Owner white-faced

"As soon as Kody (sits) down to alert me, you can see the hearts of the owners drop," says Goldman.

The owner herself sits down on one of the few chairs in the place -- her face whiter than the milk her child is drinking.

"How much damage can they do -- do you have to tear the house down?" she wonders, getting out her phone to begin frantic calls.

Instead, it'll mean sinking poison deep in the ground of the foundation, where the termites retreat to.

For now, from room to room, Kody follows the pheromone trail.

"Show me. Show me," commands Goldman, as his partner lifts up a paw to scratch at another

wall.

The physical signs of the termite squatters are invisible to Goldman's small flashlight -- damaged wood from eating day and night to the methane gas they produce -- but, after hundreds of hours of training, Kody easily tracks them.

Almost every room brings a new alert from Kody -- who earns a treat at every whiff of more bad news.

His good scents today, could -- in the long run -- save the new owners of the house dollars and cents in the future. Time enough to evict the freeloaders. Making the dog who once faced being put down the country's most unusual domestic guard dog.

"I'd love to meet the guy who gave him up," says Goldman.

"Wouldn't he be surprised what became of that puppy he gave up."