

Ricky – Bay View's bedbug detecting beagle



Glenn McCullough and Ricky. Ricky was an abused dog, a rescue, who with a lot of love and security in his new home, has been restored to a happy, very sweet-natured pooch. –photo Katherine Keller

For generations, parents have tucked their children into bed

with the peculiar little rhyme, "Sleep tight, and don't let the bedbugs bite." Unfortunately that lighthearted bedtime saying has new relevance in light of the current bedbug epidemic in the United States, including Milwaukee.

In the past, the traditional route for home and other property owners, who suspected an infestation by those vampire-like pests, was contacting an exterminator, who would painstakingly search for the parasitic insects and if found, exterminate them.

Recently, an alternative method has begun to be employed to detect bedbugs in the United States. Dogs, especially beagles with their keen sense of smell, are being used across the country as an accurate and reasonably priced alternative for detecting the often difficult-to-find bloodsucking parasites.

Glenn McCullough is proprietor of A.S.A.P. Bed Bug Detection, which he began operating in February. His one and only employee is Ricky, a 4-year-old mixed-breed beagle, a rescue from Tennessee. He is trained to detect bedbugs and earned his certification from the National Entomology Scent Detection Canine Association (NESDCA).

Ricky learned his trade from Pepe Peruyero, a Florida-based canine trainer, who teaches dogs to detect bedbugs and termites.

After his military service in the Marines, McCullough worked in the investment business and traveled extensively throughout his career. Always a dog lover, he obedience-trained Weimaraners, Redbone Coonhounds, Black and Tan Coonhounds, and English Pointers that he has owned over the years. While helping his son train his Vizsla, McCullough decided that he wanted a working dog. He had heard about bedbug detection dogs and began researching canine bedbug detection businesses in October 2013. He talked to breeders and owners of businesses that use insect-detecting dogs, including one owner in the

Detroit area who referred him to Peruyero.

McCullough connected with Peruyero's Pepedogs. and through a package deal, he received Ricky, the prerequisite training required to run a successful insect-detecting dog business, and follow up support through Scentworx, a division of Pepedogs. Ricky received 800 hours of bedbug detection training "Pepe has training down to a science," McCullough said. Even so, Ricky's training is ongoing. He trains twice daily, detecting bedbugs that McCullough keeps stored in vials.

Beagles and terriers are primarily used for bedbug detection – "dogs with a high food drive and a high work drive," McCullough said. "When it's time to *work* and I say that magic word to Ricky, it's like a light switch goes on, and he's ready to work."

And all it takes is one live bedbug for Ricky to detect it, McCullough said.

Ricky's Work Day

McCullough said most of the calls he receives are from people who already have a strong suspicion they have bedbugs, evidenced by blood drops on bedding or by bites – a series of itchy red marks on the skin. Bedbugs are generally small and can be difficult to see with the naked eye, but they can swell to the size of an apple seed after they feed.

Some apartment managers contact McCullough because they want to be able to advertise bedbug-free apartments to prospective tenants.

When the man/dog partners begin their inspection. McCullough begins in a "scent zone," within several feet of the location where bedbugs are suspected to exist. If Ricky picks up the scent of a bedbug, he puts his nose where he found the scent and paws it. Ricky has an 85 to 90 percent accuracy record,

McCullough said.

Using canine bedbug detection can be cost effective, according to McCullough. It usually takes Ricky about 20 minutes to locate bedbugs, while it may take human beings (professional exterminators) several hours to search a home, often using disruptive practices such as tipping mattresses and box springs and emptying drawers.

According to NESDCA's website, there are approximately 214 certified bedbug dogs in the United States and several in Canada. McCullough said there are only two other companies with certified dogs in the Milwaukee area, and those businesses also offer extermination services. McCullough's services do not include extermination.

McCullough inspects both residential and commercial properties and will inspect a car, luggage, dorm room, etc., anywhere a client suspects there may be bedbugs. The base price for home inspections is \$75, but may be higher depending on the location and the size of the job.

McCullough said he might expand his client base to include senior care facilities. He would also like to provide his services to travelers at Mitchell General International Airport, providing luggage inspection. He said he would have to work out the specifics with airport operations personnel regarding the workspace. "We can't have clients taking their luggage apart in the parking lot," he joked.

Prevention

Bedbugs are notorious hitchhikers. To protect oneself while traveling, McCullough said it is best to store luggage in the bathtub, since bedbugs cannot crawl up enamel or acrylic surfaces. One should always inspect hotel rooms for signs of bedbugs. Look for blood spots on mattresses and linens. Do not leave clothing lying on the bed or on the floor, and never put clothing in hotel dressers.

When arriving home after travel, McCullough recommends putting suitcases into a large trash bag and emptying everything directly from the suitcase into the washing machine. Wash the clothing at the highest temperature setting, and keep the suitcase itself in a trash bag until it can be steamed or thoroughly cleaned with rubbing alcohol.

In the event of a bedbug infestation, eradication requires a series of chemical treatments of up to nine different insecticides. “Or the nuclear, surefire way is to heat the room to 120 degrees for three hours,” McCullough said.

Because A.S.A.P. Bedbug Detection’s services are limited finding bedbugs, McCullough refers customers to exterminators.

Ricky, who is the family’s pet dog, has been adjusting well to his new career: “He’s coming along fine. I’m pleased,” McCullough said.

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