

Bedbug-sniffing canine putting a bite on vermin

By [JC REINDL](#)

BLADE STAFF WRITER

He's friendly and obedient, his fur is the color of chocolate, and he earns his keep sniffing out those dreaded and elusive bloodsuckers known to lurk in mattresses.

Toledo, meet Hershey: He's a nationally certified bedbug detection dog who's visiting from Cincinnati to help rid Vistula Manor and other residential properties of infestations.

Hershey's job precedes remediation. Exterminators, after all, must know where to spray.

"He's a bedbug-sniffing dog," said the Labrador retriever's owner and handler, John Montgomery, who with his wife, LeAnne, operate Canine Bedbug Finder from their home outside Cincinnati. "We're going apartment by apartment ... he'll sniff beds, he'll sniff sofas and chairs and piles of clothes."

The small, reddish-brown insects known as bedbugs are about the size of an apple seed. The bugs lie in wait during the day and emerge at night to feast on the blood of a host.

Their hapless victims never see what bit them, and wake up the next morning to red itchy marks on their arms and legs. Tiny blood smears on bed sheets are another sign of their visit.

After decades of absence, bedbugs started to reappear in Ohio and throughout of the country earlier this decade.

New York City is considered the nation's leading bedbug battleground.



John Montgomery and his dog Hershey inspect an apartment at Vistula Manor on Cherry Street for potential bedbug infestation. The dog, rescued from a pound, is trained to detect bedbugs. (THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT)

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Vistula Manor janitor Richard Cole takes notes on findings of John Montgomery and his bedbug-sniffing dog, Hershey, from their apartment inspections. (THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT)

They can take up residence anywhere, but tend to thrive in well-trafficked places like hotels, housing complexes, and dormitories.

Mr. Montgomery and Hershey, who was rescued from a pound in Florida, came to Toledo at the request of the Lucas Metropolitan Housing Authority. Linnie Willis, LMHA executive director, said the agency recently received reports of bedbugs in several properties, including Vistula Manor on Cherry Street downtown.

Last week the duo visited LMHA's Parqwood Apartments on Nebraska Avenue. They are scheduled to check out the agency's Durrell Manor, Flory Gardens, and John Holland Estates in coming weeks. Bedbugs have been said to dwell in all those properties except Durrell.

"We wanted to try this to see if we could sniff them out and find out where they are," said Ms. Willis, whose agency pays Mr. Montgomery \$12 per apartment unit inspected. "We have got to do what we've got to do to get rid of this problem."

Hershey and his owner began room-to-room rounds in the 164-unit Vistula Manor on Tuesday and are set to finish their inspection today.

The bug hunters were accompanied by building janitor Richard Cole, who took note of each infested unit and room furnishing.

Mr. Cole admitted that he was initially sceptical of the dog's abilities until he saw him nearly make a beeline to a vial of live bedbugs that Mr. Montgomery hid in a room as a test.

"Now I'm a believer," he said.

The inspection began on the third floor of the residential complex, which houses handicapped, elderly, and disabled residents who meet lower-income requirements.

Mr. Montgomery, 61, held Hershey's leash as he guided him through each apartment, pointing fingers to potential trouble areas such as beds and sofas. The dog is trained to sit down if he detects live bedbugs. Each time he does so, Mr. Montgomery gives him a treat.

"He only alerts to the scent of live bedbugs. So he passes by the scent of any other bugs or even dead bedbugs - he's just interested in the live ones," said Mr.

BEDBUGS

The parasitic insect has resurfaced in the past decade.



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- About the size of an apple seed
- Largely nocturnal
- Feed off human blood
- Found near where people sleep
- Bites cause skin irritations, rashes

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Montgomery, who also carries a small magnifying glass to verify "the live ones from the lint."

Margaret Higgs wasn't expecting a dog at her door when she opened her apartment for Mr. Montgomery and Hershey. And a dog that smells bedbugs? You've got to be kidding.

"He can really tell?" asked Ms. Higgs, 74, who watched in disbelief as Hershey sniffed around her boudoir. "Are you serious? This is fascinating!"

While her apartment received a clean bill of health, a neighbor across the hall wasn't so lucky.

Hershey could smell trouble festering in a bed of double-stacked mattresses covered in piles of clothes. The room's occupant, Joetta McElya, 60, stretched out an arm showing old bedbug bites.

"It was all up on my arms, all over my legs," she said.

Mr. Montgomery estimated that about 40 percent of the units he inspected in Vistula Manor are infested with bedbugs. He said the building presents several common factors in the insects' spread: close living quarters and widespread use of second-hand furniture.

College dorms make good breeding grounds for similar reasons. Mr. Montgomery said he sees a spike in business in January from parents whose children unknowingly brought bedbugs home from college for the holidays.

A former hearing aid salesman, Mr. Montgomery said he thought little about bedbugs until last year after he rented a lift chair from a medical supply company while recovering from hip surgery. The chair had bedbugs, which soon spread throughout the house.

The Montgomerys spent months and hundreds of dollars trying to eradicate the problem. But the bugs, which lay eggs and can hibernate for months, kept coming back. Mr. Montgomery said that they found Hershey with a bedbug dog trainer at the Florida Canine Academy. The Montgomerys brought the dog back to Ohio to help with their own recurring bedbug problems and those of others as a part-time hobby.

But Mr. Montgomery said he found bedbugs so wide-spread around Cincinnati that he and Hershey went into business full-time.

He said that by necessity, bedbug sniffing is very much a lifestyle for a dog. Mr. Montgomery said he keeps Hershey's nose sharp by hiding vials of bedbugs

around the house. To eat, the dog must first locate the bugs. "He's first a working dog and second a family pet," Mr. Montgomery said.

Mr. Montgomery said his clients generally choose between two forms of extermination. They can go the pesticide route, which can involve various chemicals.

And because bedbugs can't stand high heat, exterminators can try to cook them to death using special heaters.

Mr. Willis said LMHA will wait to review Hershey's findings before choosing an extermination method.

The Toledo-Lucas County Health Department this year has received two complaints about bed bugs at Vistula, as well as more than a dozen reports at apartment buildings, hotels, and other residences.

Ohio's problem with bed bugs began a few years ago in Cincinnati, followed by Columbus, said Alan Ruffell, director of environmental health for the Toledo-Lucas County Health Department.

"They're kind of making their way up to us, but at this point in time, I wouldn't say they're a huge problem," he said.

Staff writer Julie McKinnon contributed to this report.