



Search
Fri, Jan 31, 2003

- Local & State**
- Home
- Archive
- Military Briefs
- Traffic Roundup
- Your Neighbors

- Home News**
- Local & State News
- Nation & World
- Sports
- Business
- Weather
- Hurricane Center

- Features**
- Tax Break 2003
- Charlie Walker
- Cecil's World
- Message Boards
- News by Email
- NASCAR News
- Games
- Datebook-Nonprofit
- Entertainment
- Best of the Pee Dee
- Gov't In Action
- Milestones
- Obituaries
- Our Town
- Opinion
- Pee Dee Living
- Religion Briefs
- HealthView
- S.C. Lottery

- Marketplace**
- Employment
- Home of the Week
- Other Classifieds
- 360° Tours

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Local & State News

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Jan 31, 2003

Dogs sniff out termites, toxic mold in buildings

By DWIGHT DANA
Morning News

FLORENCE -- Sydney's mission at Cumberland United Methodist Church was to make sure the foundation remains firm for its members.

Restoration plans are in the wings for the historic church located along South Coit Street. But the restoration progress is being hampered because the foundation is under attack by ageless and indiscriminating enemies.

Sydney, a Labrador, was summoned because she is the only certified termite hunting dog in North Carolina and South Carolina, said her trainer, Christie Taylor of Greenville.

Her specialty is finding live termites. She can also detect toxic mold, as can her companion, an Australian shepherd named Gabe.

Sydney found termite damage at the church. But neither she nor Gabe sniffed out any mold problems.

"Sydney sits and points with her nose when she finds live termites," Taylor said. "She found them around the altar, in the walls and several other places at Cumberland United Methodist."

Taylor spent 20 years in the design end construction with large companies before embarking on her current profession. She is both a master termite inspector and a certified indoor environmentalist. A CIE can detect problems caused by heating and air conditioning systems and a host of other indoor problems.

"The advantage of using Sydney to locate termites is she can do it quickly and pinpoint areas that have damage," Taylor said. "It's cheaper, faster and you don't have to tear into areas where you think there are termites."

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Both Sydney and Gabe were rescued from Florida animal shelters. They were trained by Bill Whitstine, a master dog trainer in Tampa.

Taylor and her husband Marvin, owner of a forensic architecture company, bought the dogs last fall. Taylor has continued the training using a pinwheel.

"I put termites and mold cultures in the pinwheel along with other unrelated things and spin it," Taylor said. "When Sydney and Gabe sniff out the termites and mold, they are rewarded with food."

The same holds true when canines spot termites and mold on the job. They are praised and rewarded.

"Sydney actually starts drooling when she sniffs what she is looking for," Taylor said. "She knows doing her job means getting something good to eat."

Sydney and Gabe have demonstrated their prowess in Greenville and Hilton Head Island in addition to Florence.

When they aren't on the job, they enjoy the comforts of the Taylors' home and its four surrounding acres.

"I feel we have tapped a niche market," Taylor said. "The more we do, the more our reputation is spreading."

For more information, visit makedoggonensure.com, e-mail mail@makedoggonensure.com or call (864) 444-6678.

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