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Mold-sniffing dog goes into inspection business

COLLEGE STATION -- Texas A&M University officials and a Houston businessman have unleashed the latest device to combat the state's enormous mold problem.

Meet Max, a lovable mutt who is possibly the state's first mold-sniffing dog.

The golden-haired, 1-year-old Labrador and border collie mix belongs to Bellaire allergy store owner Eric Voss.

For prices starting at about \$500, Max will inspect a site for mold -- a price Voss says is less than testing a home with the latest technology. And Max, Voss says, is far more efficient.

Max demonstrated his abilities in the lobby of the veterinary college, locating a moldy canister several times by straddling it and pointing at it with his nose.

With Texas accounting for 70 percent of the nation's mold claims in 2001 -- some \$1 billion in losses -- Voss said his fledgling company is just scratching at the surface of a potentially lucrative business.

"Our expectation, based on use of mold-detecting dogs in other states, is that Max will be very successful," said Voss, a veterinarian's son who received an MBA from A&M in 1987. He brought Max to his alma mater's renowned veterinary college to make sure he was in tip-top shape before embarking on a career as a mold sleuth.

Voss shelled out a lot of bones -- some \$12,500 -- to buy Max from the Florida Training Academy, the nation's only company that trains dogs to detect mold.

Company spokesman Tovey Giezentanner said that in addition to being able to detect live mold colonies behind concrete, drywall and floors, dogs can also sniff out inactive colonies that machines cannot.

"I've seen it happen on one occasion that a dog even found mold in a ceiling," Giezentanner said excitedly.

Robert Black, spokesman for the Texas Department of Insurance, didn't howl with glee at the news of Texas' first mold-detecting hound.

"Here in Texas, we've gone from men in moon suits to a mold-sniffing Scooby Doo," Black said cattily.

-- **Ron Nissimov,**

higher education beat



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