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SMALL PARENT INVESTMENT

BIG STUDENT RETURN

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WSJ.com

NEW YORK | AUGUST 21, 2010

City Considers Sniffing at Bedbugs

By MELANIE GRAYCE WEST

To fight the scourge of bedbugs, New York City is considering bringing in the hounds.

Dogs are considered among the most effective tools in detecting the bugs, and the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development is evaluating the idea of hiring its own pack, which would service multifamily residential properties throughout the city.

"We are exploring the option of acquiring bedbug sniffing dogs since we feel that they could be an asset in the City's ongoing efforts to address the growing bedbug problem," a housing department spokesman said in an email, adding: "a final decision has not been made yet."



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Keith Bedford for The Wall Street Journal

Tyrone Miller of A&C Pest Management with bedbug sniffer Hunter.

Even as dogs become more ubiquitous in the bedbug business, there's concern that some operators might not be adequately training them. One expert cautions that dogs must be specially trained to detect live infestations, instead of residual bedbug debris such as carcasses, feces or bedbug skins.

"People can get ripped off and probably are getting ripped off by certain dogs that aren't trained properly," said University of Florida entomology professor Philip Koehler. He is a co-author of a 2008 study in the *Journal of Economic Entomology* that found bedbug-sniffing dogs that are "trained to locate live bedbugs and viable bedbug eggs had an overall accuracy of 97%."

Two canine academies in Florida are the big players for bedbug pooches; they say the New York area represents their biggest destination for the dogs, which

cost about \$10,000 each.



"Right now, the way the industry is, there is such high demand that anyone that has groomed a dog is selling bug-detection dogs," said Pepe Peruyero, owner of J&K Canine Academy in High Springs, Fla.

His main competitor said the demand has led some to cut corners on training. "Some people look at this as a good money-making thing," said Bill Whitstine, owner of Florida Canine Academy in Safety Harbor, Fla.



The city that never sleeps? Tell that to New York's bedbugs. The tiny blood suckers specialize in feeding off sleeping bodies and this summer in the Big Apple they're enjoying the pickings of their lives, specialists say. Courtesy AFP.

The New York Department of Environmental Conservation, which licenses businesses that apply pesticide, has no control over dogs and their handlers.

Support for a certification program for dogs and handlers has been slowly mobilizing. The National Pest Management Association is considering protocols and standards for bedbug-sniffing dogs. And Messrs. Peruyero and Whitstine are affiliated with competing bedbug dog-certification

organizations.

Most of the dogs that work in the industry are rescued from shelters.

Mr. Peruyero prefers Beagle mixes, while Mr. Whitstine mostly works with Labrador Retriever mixes. During the training, which can take months, dogs are rewarded with food when they find bugs. Dogs are taught to signal the presence of bugs by sitting, pointing or pawing the affected area.

"It's not quite as easy as what everything thinks," said Dr. Koehler.

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