



Get a whiff of this duo

DECLARING THEMSELVES "THE SOUTHEAST'S FINEST SNIFFERS," Bob Carter ('84) and his mold-sniffing dog, Brandy, are changing the nation's mold-inspecting business. Carter founded Elite Detection Dawgs, based in Atlanta in January 2003, and added Brandy, a 2-year-old chocolate Labrador retriever, to his team in February 2003. Find out how Brandy made it from "doggie-death-row" to become one of only 10 mold-detecting dogs in the nation.

The Southeast's finest sniffers

Bob Carter ('84) and his mold-sniffing dog, Brandy, are changing the nation's mold-inspecting business. Carter's company, Elite Detection Dawgs LLC, is based in Atlanta. By using Brandy, a 2-year-old chocolate Labrador retriever, to find sources of mold in schools, homes and office buildings, Elite has surpassed most other mold detection agencies in the Southeast whose only means of detection is scientific testing - a slow and less accurate process of mold detection.

Rescued from "doggie-death-row" at the Peneles County animal shelter, Brandy is one of only 10 mold-detecting dogs in the nation. She has completed more than 1,000 hours training to find mold, is tested quarterly and re-certified annually.

Carter, a speech communications major who specialized in radio and television, is originally from Hampton. He has lived in Maui, Nepal and Fiji, where he did mission work with Youth with a Mission. Carter says that he "plans to retire on land that was given to him by friends in Fiji. They were so grateful for my help that they [Sisa and Sera Vukialau] named their child after me."

But retirement is far in the future for Carter and Brandy. Carter was first introduced to the issues surrounding mold while working for a major air filter company in Virginia, and he decided to open Elite Detection Dawgs.

Carter's cheerful enthusiasm and devotion to his career is palpable. Constantly petting Brandy, Carter says that she was trained by Bill Whitstine, a Certified Master Trainer. Whitstine found Brandy - then known as Yankee - at the Peneles County animal shelter, and her history with shelters was abysmal. She was originally held at the Blairsville, Ga., animal shelter as a stray and returned on Christmas Eve after a family adopted her for less than two months.

Whitstine saw potential in Brandy, rescued her and began training her to detect mold. Since Labradors are known for their keen sense of smell, they are often trained to be drug, arson and bomb detectors.

Although Carter is not a Certified Master Trainer, he is a professional dog handler. Whitstine taught him exercises used to keep Brandy alert and on the lookout for mold. One training exercise - the calibration wheel - uses a device that has several containers on it. Only one contains mold. Brandy walks around the containers as Carter says, "Seek, seek." When she finds the mold, she sits down and pats her feet, using passive alert behavior to inform Carter of her findings.

Carter believes the key to his company's success is "people's trust of dogs." He says, "Most people are always happy to see dogs, especially labs, who have really proven to be the top dogs in the field." Brandy is the only mold-detecting dog in Georgia and that keeps Elite Detection Dawgs busy. Before dogs were trained as mold detectors, people could ignore mold problems or choose from two options: inexpensive do-it-yourself kits, which often produce inaccurate results or expensive air-quality specialists who cannot pinpoint the exact areas of mold.

Brandy finds mold inexpensively and without damage to a building's construction, then Carter sends the mold out to an independent certified laboratory and microbiologist for verification and analyzing. Customers can then decide on removal options.

Carter hopes to expand his business with the purchase of a bomb-sniffing dog. "I hope that dog has as gentle a spirit as Brandy does," he says. Carter's main goals are to "promote safer and healthier living and working environments," and to "provide accurate and cost-effective solutions for clients."

With his partner Brandy's help, he's proven that it is possible.

On a typical day working with a highly trained mold-sniffing dog, Carter says that it's hard to believe he used to spend his days hanging out with road dogs and musicians. "I crammed four years into five at JMU," he laughs, "while working as a sound mixer and promoter for the Cornerstone Band." The bluegrass band was comprised of Carter's close friends, David Thacker, David Peters, Robbie Pitt, Drew Trotman and Steve Cochran.

"The years managing those guys are some of my favorite college memories," he says. Carter also worked several bluegrass and jazz festivals, including High Sierra, Harvest Fest, Bluegrass Jazz Funk, Burke Fest and Bonaroo. Other high notes of his road dog years include driving the tour bus for Phish and touring with Widespread Panic. Carter and the Widespread Panic musicians organized the successful Beat the Drum fundraiser, which provides drum kits for children.

By Allison Mall ('04), Montpelier editorial assistant