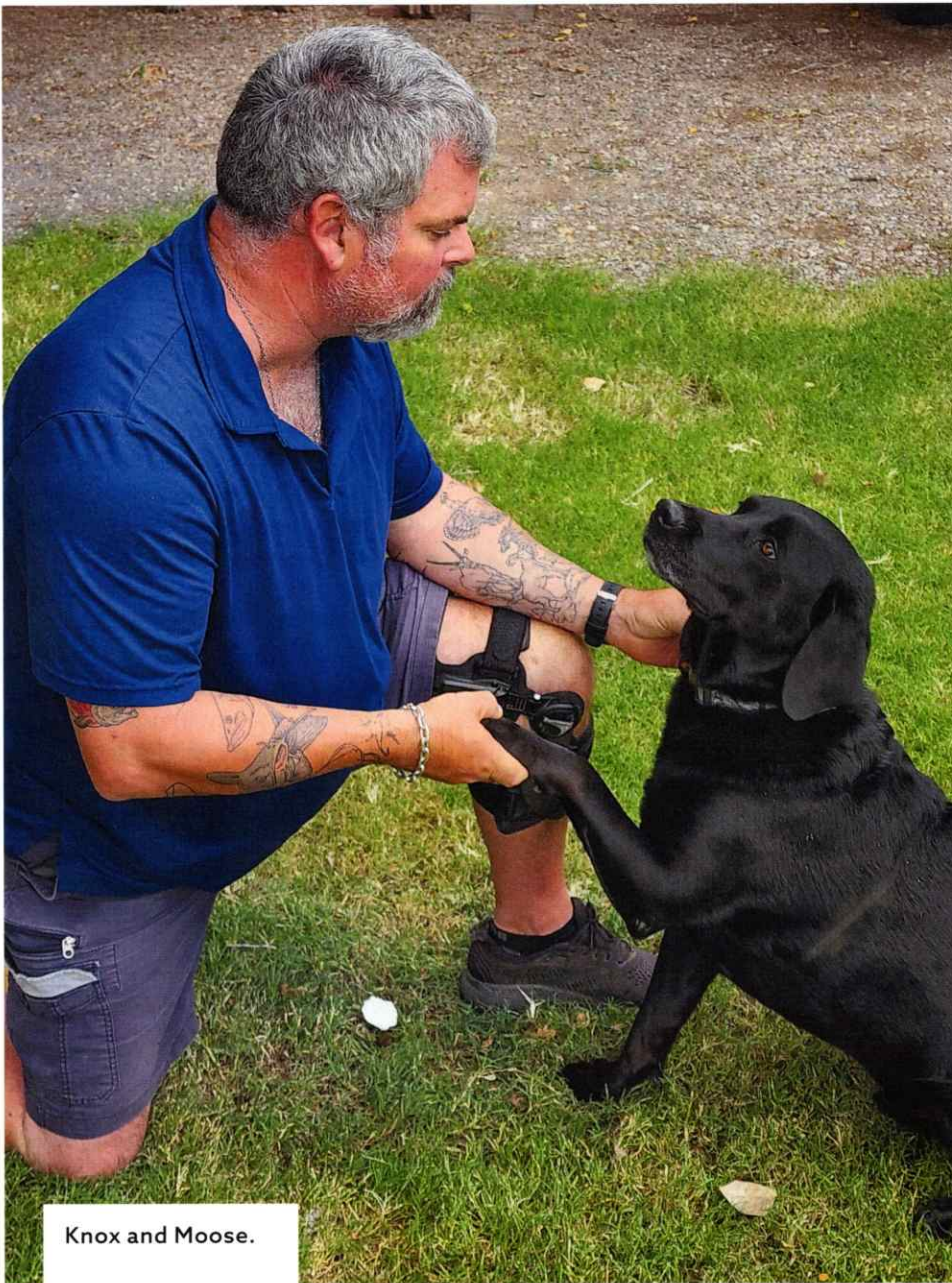


By Jen Reeder

Amazing M

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF KNOX JOHNSTON



Knox and Moose.

*Lab sniffs out
bed bugs to help
people sleep easy.*

Everyone hates bed bugs,
so everyone loves a black
Lab named Moose.

Moose works in New Mexico as a bed bug detection dog with his handler Knox Johnston, owner of Southwest Bed Bug Resources and Southwest Pest Control. They drive all around the state to homes, hotels, apartment complexes, and businesses helping people locate creepy crawlies.

With his powerful nose, Moose can quickly pinpoint where the pests are hiding – both live bed bugs and their eggs. Recently, he worked in a house where the owners had found one bed bug and worried there might be more. After searching each room alongside Johnston, Moose entered a spare bedroom and

oose

immediately alerted on a trunk a relative had recently brought in.

"It had all these linens in it," Johnston recalls. "She started emptying it out, and there was one in the corner, down there at the very bottom."

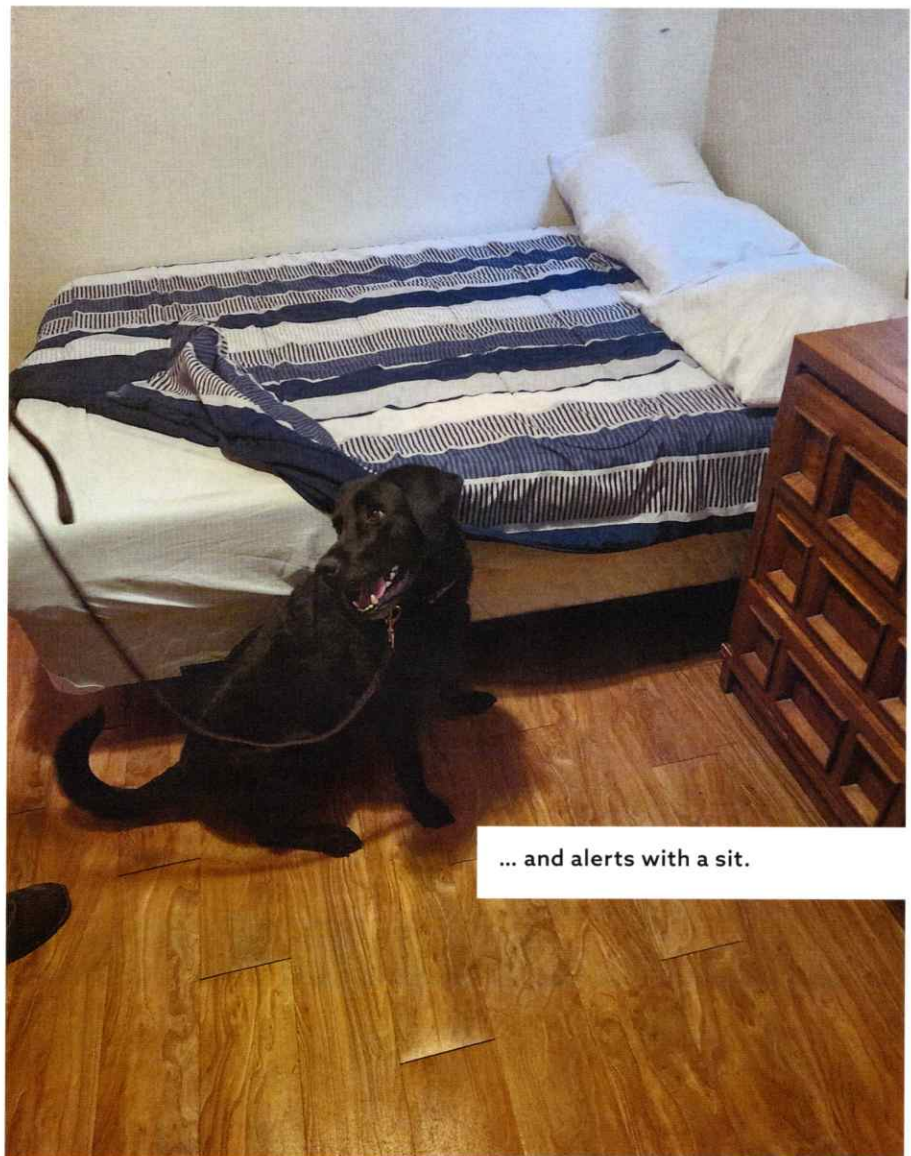
It's all in a day's work for Moose, who's worked with Johnston since 2020. The energetic dog proved too much for his first owners, who relinquished him to a shelter. Fortunately, a renowned trainer in Kansas City – Matt Skogen of IronHeart High Performance Working Dogs – saw his potential as a detection dog. Johnston was happy to partner with Moose because he's a longtime Lab lover whose past pets have worked with him in duck hunting, field trials, and search and rescue.

"I always prefer a Lab," he says. "They're easy to train. They always want to please you. They're just an easygoing dog."

Clients often want to pet Moose, so Johnston cautions them to wait until after the Lab is done working. In fact, beforehand he sends them a preparation list, which includes instructions like not cooking bacon just before a search. One piece of advice is particularly important since Moose's reward for a successful find is playing with a tennis ball.

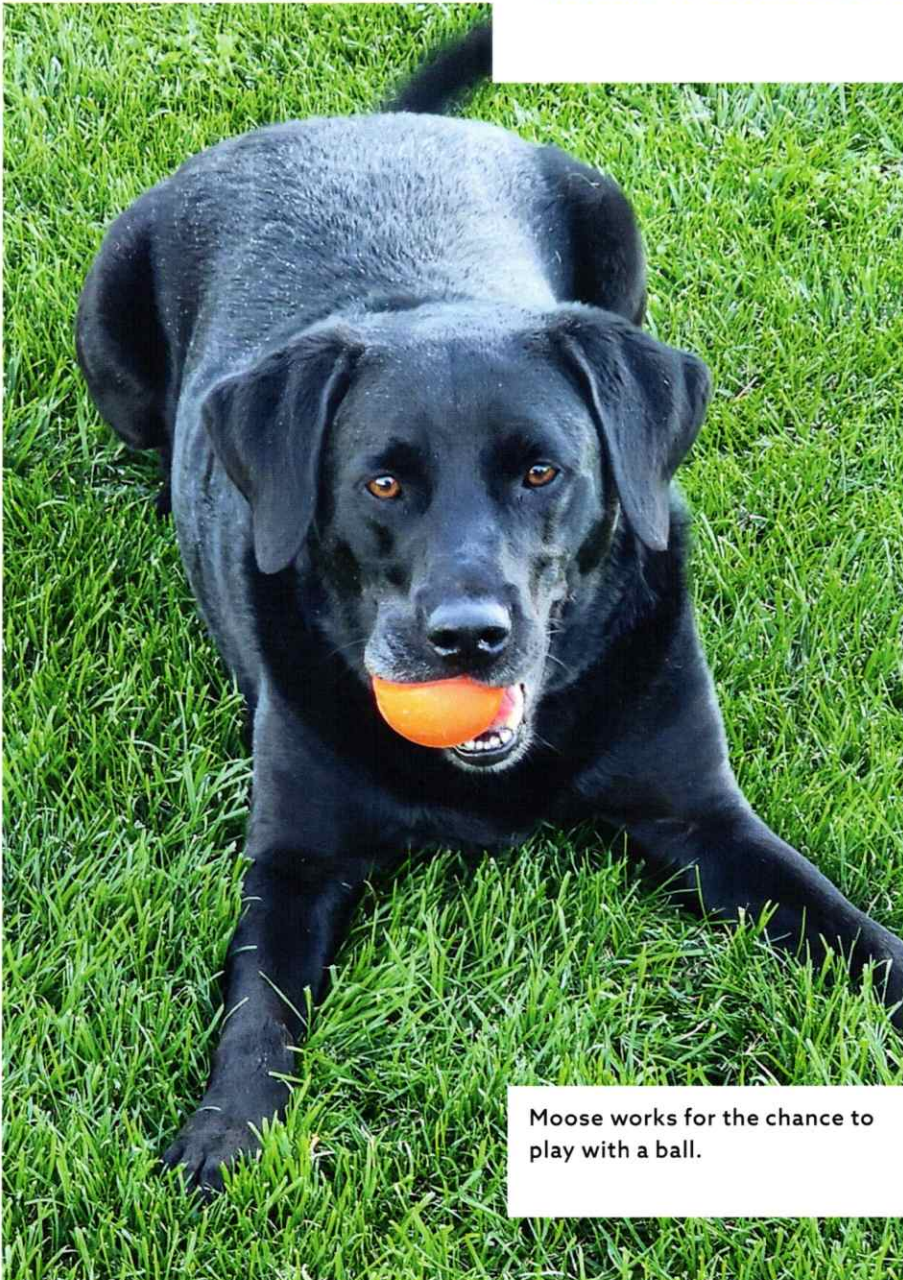


Moose searches for bed bugs with Knox Johnston...



... and alerts with a sit.

**“
There has not been one person
who has not loved him. They
always tell me, ‘Moose is more
than welcome to come back.’”**



Moose works for the chance to play with a ball.

“There can’t be any toys on the floor because if he sees a tennis ball, then it’s over,” Johnston says with a chuckle.

When the team arrives at a job site, Johnston looks everything over to make sure it’s ready for Moose. Then he clips the leash onto Moose’s collar and urges, “Go find our bugs.” Moose gets so excited to work that Johnston practically has to run to keep up while Moose inspects baseboards and furniture.

“He can clear a hotel room in about thirty seconds,” he says. “Everyone else has to flip a bed over and take it apart, but not with a dog. It probably takes us longer to walk to each individual room than for him to search it.”

When Moose finds a bed bug, he alerts by sitting. Sometimes he’ll bite at the corner where the pests lurk because he seems to share Johnston’s aversion to them – he used to have nightmares about scratching at biting bed bugs due to the infestations they’ve seen.

Thanks to Moose pinpointing bed bugs before major infestations, clients

can decide to use poisons to “bomb” one specific room, or heat it to 140 degrees to kill the pesky pests. (Johnston prefers to use heat as a treatment.)

At home, Moose enjoys swimming, playing fetch, and relaxing with the family, which includes Johnston’s fiancé, Charlotte Vigel, and their two cats, Macey and Gunner. On days off, Johnston hides vials of bed bugs around their home to keep the Lab’s skills sharp, and because Moose enjoys searching so much.

On the job, Moose invariably wows clients – even potential clients. In one memorable instance, Knox brought Moose to an Albuquerque hotel to demonstrate his skills. The hotel staff seemed skeptical. Then Moose “hit” on the corner of a bed.

“They flipped the bed over and everything else, and there was one bed bug in the center of the bed on the bottom of the box spring,” Johnston recalls. “They hired us.”

While Johnston enjoys building a satisfied client base and helping people find and eradicate bed bugs, Moose relishes the attention he receives from grateful clients after a job well done.

“He rubs up against them like he’s a cat,” Johnston says. “He loves the attention. There has not been one person who has not loved him. They always tell me, ‘Moose is more than welcome to come back.’”

That’s certainly the case for Nick Macias, who is the maintenance manager for a company that takes care of group homes. After a chemical treatment didn’t eradicate bed bugs from a property, Macias was at his wits’ end until a colleague mentioned Southwest Bed Bug Resources uses a detection dog.

“I didn’t believe it,” he recalls. “I’m like, ‘Yeah, okay. We’ll see.’ So we ended up giving them a call. They came out, and a beautiful little black Lab gets out of the car.... He got to work the house, which is really, really cool to see.”

Moose made Macias a believer. When a couple of residents in another home complained of bites, his first call was to Johnston, who brought Moose to sniff out bed bugs and their spawn.

“I don’t know if you’re familiar with bed bugs, but you can’t normally see them,” he explains. “You can see full-grown adults, and by that time your house is probably pretty bad.”

Moose doesn’t alert on dead bugs, so when he comes back after treatment and doesn’t alert, people know the property is free from former infestations.

That was a relief for Adrian Angulo, who hired Moose to search his home after his young daughter began waking up with red bite marks on her body. Angulo and his wife had recently hosted out-of-town guests who likely introduced the pests to their home.

“I immediately started looking into bed bug remediation and was bombarded with [pest control companies offering], ‘Call us now and we’ll spray your house tomorrow,’” he says. “But I have a two-year-old daughter at home, and I’ve always been cautious and apprehensive about ‘just spray things and hope for the best.’”

When Angulo learned there was an alternative – a bed bug detection dog and heat treatment – it immediately piqued his interest.

“I called them up and Knox was incredible,” he recalls. “He just reassured me with, ‘The fact that you have bed bugs does not mean you’re dirty or disgusting. You can get them at movie theaters, you can get them from library books, you can get them from airplanes. You can get them from someone that sat in your house for ten minutes. They’re very common.’”

Moose showed up and proved to be “the best of boys” by alerting on the mattress in the baby’s room.

“He sat and let out a huff,” he says. “It was just incredible to know specifically which corner of the bed they were in.... Moose was able to pinpoint that there were only two rooms with bed bugs, and the heat took care of everything.”

Now Macias recommends canine bed bug detection services like those offered by Southwest Bed Bug Resources to other parents or anyone hesitant to treat their home with pesticides.

“For anybody who wants a different solution, Knox and Moose are it,” he says. “Absolutely.” 🐾

For more information, visit: swbedsbug.com.



Award-winning journalist **JEN REEDER** is former president of the Dog Writers Association of America. She became a self-proclaimed “crazy dog lady” after she and her husband adopted a lovable Lab mix named Rio. Visit her online at www.jenReeder.com.