

Bradenton exterminator to give 3 free bed bug eradications for Christmas

MANATEE -- Ten years ago, Keller's Pest Control received no calls regarding extermination of bed bugs, those reclusive insects sustained by a blood meal from a human host.

Seven years ago, there was an increase to one call per month, company President Rodney O'Quinn said Friday.

Now, Keller's Pest Control, 1510 53rd Ave. W., Bradenton, is averaging six to 10 calls per day, 180 to 300 calls a month, O'Quinn said.

"The official explanation is that the increase has been caused by travelers from Europe, especially Eastern Europe," O'Quinn said.

No matter where they came from, bed bugs are now a problem in Manatee County and all over the United States, according to the U.S. National Pest Management Association.

The association reports a 71 percent increase in bed bug calls in the United States between 2000 and 2005.

Not only are bed bugs getting more common, but getting rid of them is expensive, O'Quinn said.

A typical extermination runs about \$2,000, according to O'Quinn.

But this Christmas season, Keller's Pest Control intends to reward three needy families free bed bug exterminations, O'Quinn said.

"We come out to do estimates to many homes and I hear, 'I can't afford that' and I feel badly for them," O'Quinn said. "I decided for Christmas I want to exterminate bed bugs from three homes for free."

O'Quinn is calling his promotion, "Bed Bug Free in 2016" because he wants to start in January.

"Because of the heat treatment we use we don't want to do it with Christmas gifts around the house," he said.

There are a few qualifiers.

"It has to be a house that will accept thermal radiation and they have to clean it up, so there is some stuff involved for sure before someone qualifies," O'Quinn said.

Size of an apple seed

O'Quinn has a colorful way of describing what a bed bug looks like.

"It's the same size as an apple seed," O'Quinn said. "It has legs and it moves. Every three or so days they feed. They prefer a human but they will feed on a pet. Most people do not have a reaction to the bite, but 25 percent of people do have an allergic reaction."

Keller's Pest Control has gotten calls to eradicate bed bugs from banks, nursing homes, restaurants, movie theaters, vacation rental establishments on the beach in Anna Maria Island and fancy private homes, O'Quinn said.

"You can pick them up anywhere," O'Quinn said of bed bugs. "They don't care, rich or poor, black or white. If you have clutter, there are more places for them to hide and you increase your odds. When you travel, you increase your odds. When you buy used furniture, you increase your odds."

Although O'Quinn is known in Manatee County for his passion for dispensing education on bed bug prevention,

advice that centers on checking every thing that comes into the home or business and avoiding taking in furniture thrown into the street, he is probably best known for his rather creative way of exterminating bed bugs.

"Rodney is kind of on the cutting edge as far as education and prevention of bed bugs," said Mike Biggins, owner/operator of Manatee River Assisted Living Residence in Palmetto which has been in his family since 1977.

Biggins said he has followed O'Quinn's advice on bed bugs for many years and Manatee River Assisted Living Residence has never had a bed bug infestation.

"I attribute us being bed bug free to Rodney and his insistence on rules that our staff follows," Biggins said. "When people move into our residence the first thing we do is go through everything they have with a fine tooth comb to look for signs of bed bugs."

The 72 residents at Biggins' residence are allowed to bring their own furniture into their rooms, but not without a full inspection first, Biggins said.

"Someone can be clean as a pin and still end up with bed bugs," Biggins said.

Since bed bugs have developed a tougher exoskeleton against pesticides, O'Quinn's company uses a process he calls "thermal radiation" that involves killing the insects using heat.

Heat exchangers utilizing propylene glycol over coils send waves of heat into a building, eventually reaching temperatures of 126 degrees, which, according to O'Quinn is the "instant death" temperature for bed bugs and bed bug eggs.

"The whole process takes 10 to 12 hours," O'Quinn said. "My workers and I are actually inside the building when this is taking place. We go 10 minutes in, 10 minutes out. It's not really that hot to humans when you consider your oven on warm is 170 degrees."

O'Quinn and his crew are busy flipping mattresses, manipulating furniture so the heat can reach all areas, finally using a thermal imaging camera to see if anything is moving."

Those interested in the giveaway are asked by O'Quinn to submit their story of need to him via email to info@kellerspestcontrol.com. The company phone is 941-727-BUGS and the website is kellerspestcontrol.com.

Richard Dymond, Herald reporter, can be reached at 941-745-7072 or contact him via [Twitter@RichardDymond](https://twitter.com/RichardDymond).