



Birds of a feather...

They look alike, they talk alike. They share the same interest in dinosaurs, martial arts, bad TV, worse music and above all, crass put-downs. Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly star in "Step Brothers." Check for show times. | C6

Activities for golden-agers

| C2

Check your horoscope | C3

'Happenings' lists things

□ Seven-year-old from Collegeville honored for her love and commitment to animals.

■ By MELISSA BROOKS ■ Times Herald Staff

A 7-year-old from Collegeville was honored recently by the largest animal rights organization in the world—and she's not stopping at that.

PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), headquartered in Norfolk, Va., recently gave Ashraya Ananthanarayanan its Compassionate Kid Award for convincing neighbors to return a captive turtle into the wild.

"So many of us see things that upset us (about animal treatment), but not many go above and beyond to do something about it. For a 7-year-old child to follow through...that's really special."

Melissa Karpel
PETA Campaign Coordinator

An incoming third-grader at Oaks Elementary, Ashraya is already considered an animal activist in her own backyard, by PETA and by an animal welfare shelter in India.

The small turtle living behind her friend's house ventured into plain view a couple of weeks ago and was captured by two boys. Ashraya watched the boys house the tiny reptile in a small cooler while discussing plans for their new pet.

"That made me really sad for the turtle, and I became very upset," she said, attributing her disap-

pointment to the fact that the animal lost its freedom and had been removed from its natural environment, without access to its proper food.

"I believe that animals should be able to have equal rights just as humans," she said.

Ashraya returned home from her play date and shared her concern with her parents, Ponnani and Aarthy, who guided her to contact PETA to find out more information.

"In her age, all she knew was it didn't feel right," Ponnani said.

She called the animal rights organization herself and explained the situation. "They told me it was illegal (keeping wild animals without a permit is against state law)," Ashraya said, "so I went back to the parents and pleaded with them to let it go."

The next morning, the turtle was back home at Perkiomen Creek. "I was very happy to see the turtle go," she said.

PETA Campaign Coordinator Melissa Karpel said the organization acknowledges the "work of individuals who have gone above and beyond (to) lead a nice example in their community."

The efforts of firefighters and businesses, anyone or any group saving animals, she said, are recognized with a Compassionate Action Award, something PETA started more than a year ago.

Since then, there have been a few kids in Ashraya's company, Karpel said, "who have done exceptional things for animals," so PETA designated a kid's award, to honor the exceptional on a case-by-case basis.



Photos by Andrea J. Stanley/

Ashraya Ananthanarayanan, shown with her dog Aryan and mother in the backyard of their Collegeville home, is already a veteran animal rights activist at 7-years old. The little girl, who was honored by PETA, also led efforts for an animal shelter in India.

organization. She was selected the shelter's official child ambassador for her efforts.

This fall, Ashraya plans to release a CD, with 10 percent of the proceeds going to PETA and 10 percent to Karunashram. She will also lead a piano fundraiser to raise additional funds for the two organizations according to Ponnani.

When a school project required her to collect dead insects, identify them and pin their bodies to paper, Ashraya received special permission to create an alternative project. She said she achieved the same purpose by learning about insects, by reading books and writing about her find-