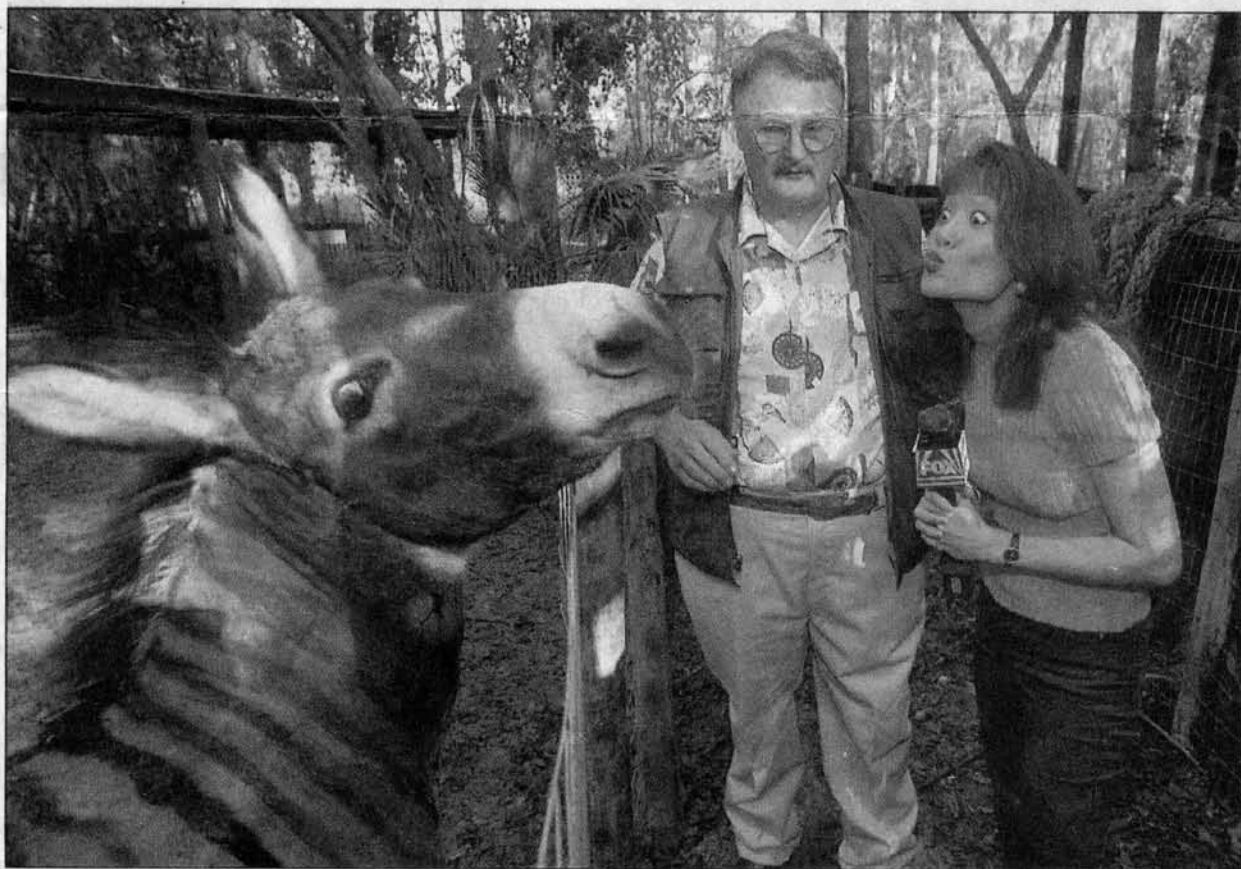


entertainment extra



Send comments and tips
through e-mail to
tribextra@prodigy.com
or write c/o
The Tampa Tribune,
P.O. Box 191,
Tampa, Fla. 33601



JAY NOLAN/Tribune photo

"Fox After Breakfast" reporter Suzanne Whang makes kissy-face with Jake the donkey during a break in the broadcast at the home of Lynn Ash, center.

TV show goes wild at artist's hideaway

THONOTOSASSA — One of Fox's "road warriors" made a pit stop here Friday to pet a peacock and feed a donkey at the home of Busch Gardens artist Lynn Ash.

And millions of TV viewers of "Fox After Breakfast" got a peek at Ash's eclectic woodland hideaway. The two-bedroom stilt house is surrounded by exotic animals and colorful props that rival anything seen in a Tarzan movie.

"It's perfect for us," said "After Breakfast" spokesman Joe Ricci. "We like to make celebrities out of real people and real people out of celebrities."

Celebrity guests drop by the show's New York studio for coffee and chats on a big comfy couch while roving reporters such as Suzanne Whang seek out "the untold and the unusual."

Whang interviewed Ash for the syndicated morning show, which is produced by Fox Television.

It airs on 165 Fox stations nationwide including WTVT, Channel 13, at 10 a.m. weekdays.

"It was exciting to have them out here," Ash says. "I have plenty to show them. I love any chance to talk about animals and art."

Ash, dressed like a real-life Indiana Jones, was worried that his animals — including Rosie, a 5-foot-tall rhea — wouldn't cooperate with strangers around.

But when Whang kissed Jake, the pet donkey at Ash's personal animal compound, he appeared to relish the attention.

"Fox After Breakfast" learned about Ash from Edie Emerald, a former Busch Gardens publicist who runs the Tampa Film Office, a local agency of the Tampa/Hillsborough Convention and Visitors Association.

Ash, who has worked at the theme park for 30 years, is a local legend.

"But the rest of the world doesn't know about him," Whang says. "And that's what so neat about this job. I get to travel all over the country meeting all kinds of interesting people. We try to find things that haven't been covered by every other national show."

Earlier this week, she interviewed Jack James, a vol-

unteer at the Christmas post office, who answers letters to Santa that come to the Florida town.

She also stopped by Winter Haven to see the amazing feet and feats of 80-year-old barefoot water-skier Banana George.

Whang, 34, is one of three so-called road warriors who take turns spending a week on the road.

When she's not traveling, Whang, who is based in Manhattan, works on stories there.

"Fox After Breakfast" debuted in August. It originated two years ago as a morning show, "Breakfast Time," on Fox's fX cable network.

Whang, originally from Virginia, is a graduate of Yale University with a degree in psychology.

She earned a master's in psychology from Brown University and was working as a medical consultant in Boston when she switched careers.

"My life changed when I signed up to be an extra while they were filming 'Spenser: For Hire' in Boston," she says.

A bit part on that 1985-88 ABC series led to improvisational comedy work, regional theater productions, television commercials and roles in movies such as "Housesitter" with Steve Martin.

Whang also appeared on the short-lived Fox drama "Against the Law" with Michael O'Keefe and the PBS series "Powerhouse."

She switched from actor to show host when an audition two years ago landed her a job on fX.

She worked on three shows: "Breakfast Time"; "The Pet Department," a series about pet care; and "Personal fX," a home shopping show featuring collectibles.

"I can still go back to acting but right now I'm having a great time," says Whang.

"I have no training as a journalist, but the skills I learned in psychology help me interview people. And my training in improv helps me keep it light and entertaining," she says.