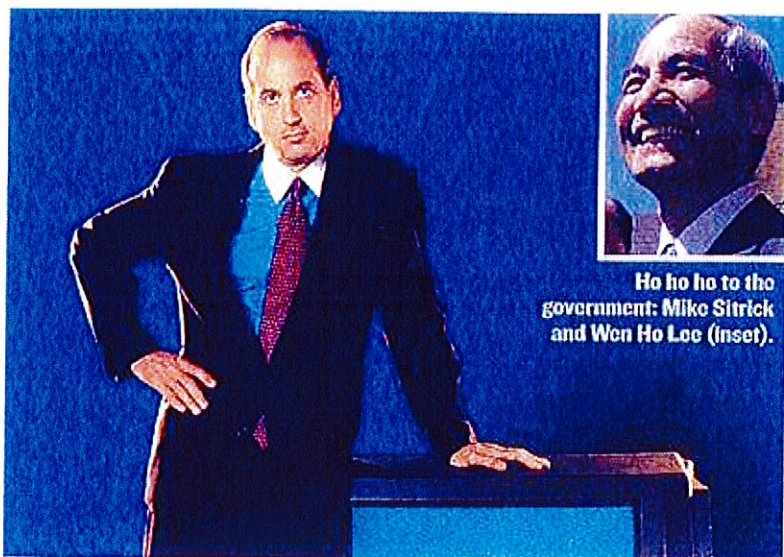


THE INFORMER

informer@forbes.com

EDITED BY WILLIAM P. BARRETT



Ho ho ho to the government: Mike Strick and Wen Ho Lee (inset).

Guilty Until Flacked

► How did media depictions of ex-Los Alamos scientist Wen Ho Lee change so quickly from suspected Chinese spy to sympathetic victim of a bumbling government smear? Hardball Los Angeles flack **Michael Strick** (FORBES, Nov. 15, 1999) takes some of the credit. Unbeknownst to the public, Strick, engaged since the summer by Lee's lawyers, fanned the flames by challenging all of the government's "conflicting insinuations" and helpfully providing reporters with documents favorable to Lee. Knowing as much as anyone about the value of good publicity, Strick waived his normal fee. —*Seth Livore*

A Different Kind of Handicapping

► Famed money manager **Sir John Templeton**, 87, just started a monthly newsletter—but don't look for hot investing tips. *Research News & Opportunities in Science & Theology* focuses on the interplay between scientific research and religion. Sample headlines in the inaugural 16-page issue: "Do Religious People Live Longer?" and "Computing and Spirituality." The newsletter goes for \$10 a year. The Bahamas-based billionaire's annual \$1 million **Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion** is the world's largest in its realm. —*Doug Donovan*

► Netscape cofounder **James Clark** has commissioned the Netherlands' venerable **Royal Huisman Shipyard** in Vollenhove to build what will be the world's largest 3-masted schooner. But his 300-foot-long, 40-foot-wide *Athena*, slated to sail June 2004, can't fit between the supports of the bridge next to the shipyard. Citing the 300-job work force, the yard wants state governments to build a roomier replacement span. Clark might end up footing part of the \$800,000 cost. —*Victoria Murphy*

One Hell of a Bridge Toll

► **Bank of America** recently cosponsored a Los Angeles ceremony at which **Morusa Records** was named Micro Business of the Year. Owner **Adrian Martinez** posed beamingly for photographs with a BofA bigwig. So two days later, when Martinez applied to the bank for a \$50,000 loan, he figured approval would be a cinch. But Martinez says BofA, citing credit concerns, was willing only if \$25,000 stayed on deposit. Result: no loan. A BofA flack says the bank had no role at all in picking the small-business winners. —*Thomas Kellner*

Bank Blessing Plus \$1.50 Equals \$1.50

► In a "top-priority project," **Fox Television Studios** in Los Angeles has e-mailed journalists seeking leads to a "country" whose name can be purchased for auction on a new TV show. One jurisdiction getting Fox's attention: **Principality of Sealand**, based on an abandoned North Sea platform. But Fox writes that "Oceanus, Vikingland and the like" could also work. Legitimacy may be something of a problem. Ocean specks are frequently known as havens for fraud. —*W.P.B.*

Your Own Personalized Nation

► In the realm of entertainment and sports, big money can be earned—and lost. Here are some celebrity bankruptcy filings in New York City and Los Angeles within the past 18 months. —*Stephane Fitch*

Now the Star and Director of *The Debtors: The Debtors!*

In the realm of entertainment and sports, big money can be earned—and lost. Here are some celebrity bankruptcy filings in New York City and Los Angeles within the past 18 months. —*Stephane Fitch*

NAME/TITLE	ASSETS/LIABILITIES	COMMENT
Lorraine Bracco /actress	\$2.2/\$2.4	\$500,000 to IRS; \$400,000 from ex, Harvey Keitel
Grace Jones /pop singer	0.7/1.6	IRS claims \$1.1 million; Paris hotel owed \$39,000
Stevie J Jordan /rap songwriter	0.2/1.5	\$150,000 payable to Sean (Puff Daddy) Combs
Elliott Kastner /movie producer	0.6/4.7	Lost \$1.3 million suit; owed Don King \$550,000
Randy & Evi Quaid /actor & director	3.4/3.5	Investor blocked release of their movie, <i>The Debtors</i>
Dick Simon /former Indy 500 driver	4.3/7.9	Ordered to pay \$880,000 to ex-racing associate



Life imitates art: Evi and Randy Quaid.