

JUDGE: GIRARDI IS FIT TO STAND TRIAL

The disgraced former lawyer, 84, accused of stealing from clients, is declared competent.

By Harriet Ryan
and Matt Hamilton

A federal judge in Los Angeles has found Tom Girardi competent to stand trial, paving the way for the disgraced former lawyer to go before a jury this year and answer charges that he stole more than \$15 million from clients as part of a decades-long fraud scheme.

The decision was announced Tuesday in a brief notation on the case docket that said U.S. District Judge Josephine L. Staton had filed an “order finding defendant competent to stand trial.”

The order was placed under seal until lawyers for both sides have a chance to identify information in it that they want kept confidential, such as health records and other sensitive material.

The ruling was a victory for prosecutors and for legions of Girardi’s former clients who feared that their erstwhile lawyer’s dementia diagnosis would forestall a jury trial and accountability for the 84-year-old.

“He’s not above the law,” said former client Danny Barnes, who estimates he lost about \$2 million from a settlement in the 1990s for [See Girardi, A9]



BILAL HUSSEIN Associated Press

NO. 2 LEADER OF HAMAS KILLED

Civil defense workers search for survivors after a blast took the lives of Saleh Arouri and three others in a suburb of Beirut. A Lebanese news agency said an Israeli drone carried out the strike. **WORLD, A3**

Mickey to get a dark makeover

Filmmakers capitalize as ‘Steamboat Willie’ enters public domain

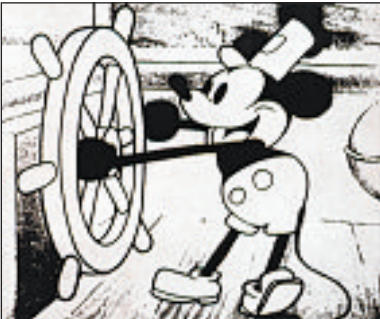
By Christi Carras

Who’s the newest horror star that’s coming to the screen?

M-I-C-K-E-Y M-O-U-S-E.

At least two Mickey Mouse-inspired horror movies have been announced since 1928’s “Steamboat Willie” — which features the earliest version of the iconic character — entered the public domain.

Disney’s copyright ownership of the seminal short film, which marked the screen debuts of both Mickey and Minnie Mouse, officially expired Monday. Directed by Walt Disney and his partner Ub Iwerks, the clas-



LMPC / Getty Images

THE COPYRIGHT for the 1928 short film “Steamboat Willie,” which marked the debut of Mickey Mouse, expired Monday.

sic cartoon stars the chipper mascot as the whistling, rascally pilot of a steamboat floating down a river.

Now that the prototype for perhaps the most famous animated figure of all time is up for grabs, independent filmmakers have wasted no time capitalizing on the opportunity.

“It’s not surprising to me that people were working on films and maybe just waiting to announce them until the new year,” said Mark Lezama, an attorney at Knobbe Martens in Orange County who specializes in patent disputes.

“It’s such a well-known character that we’ve had to wait so long [for],” [See Mickey, A9]



Supplied to the Outlaw Ocean Project by Yansel Lianus Saputra

FADHIL, an Indonesian deckhand on a Chinese fishing ship, bags up Peruvian squid. He died at sea of beriberi, a disease caused by a deficiency of vitamin B1.

Putting lives on the line to catch squid for world’s table

ABOARD THE SAM SIMON ON THE ATLANTIC — First, he was thirsty. Then came the seizures. Too tired to sit up, he vomited any water or food he consumed and lost the ability to urinate. His lower extremities swelled into what other deckhands described as “elephant feet.”

Fadhil, who was 24 and, like many Indonesians, did not use a surname, was working roughly 285 miles off the coast of Peru on a Chi-

nese squid ship called the Wei Yu 18. He begged the foreman to send him back to shore for medical care. The foreman refused, instead giving him the equivalent of ibuprofen and explaining that his contract had not ended.

“My body must reach my parents,” Fadhil whispered to Ramadhan Sugandhi, another deckhand. He died the next day, Sept. 26, 2019, having been sick for a month. The captain ordered the

crew to wrap Fadhil’s corpse in a blanket and place it in the squid freezer, where it turned black. Two days later, deckhands put Fadhil in a wooden coffin that was wrapped with an anchor chain to weigh it down and pushed the box into the sea. “I felt hopeless watching him,” Sugandhi said.

Fadhil died of a disease called beriberi, which kills an untold number of workers each year on distant-

[See Squid, A4]

Under pressure on two fronts, leader of Harvard resigns

Claudine Gay faces claims of plagiarism and backlash from antisemitism hearing.

By Steve LeBlanc
and Collin Binkley

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — Harvard University President Claudine Gay resigned Tuesday amid plagiarism accusations and criticism over testimony at a congressional hearing where she was unable to say unequivocally that calls on campus for the genocide of Jews would violate the school’s conduct policy.

Gay is the second Ivy League president to resign within a month after the hearing; Liz Magill of the

University of Pennsylvania resigned Dec. 9.

Gay, Harvard’s first Black president, announced her departure just months into her tenure in a letter to the Harvard community.

After the testimony, Gay’s academic career came under intense scrutiny by conservative activists who unearthed several instances of alleged plagiarism in her 1997 doctoral dissertation. Harvard’s governing board initially rallied behind Gay, saying a review of her scholarly work turned up “a few instances of inadequate citation” but no evidence of research misconduct.

Days later, Harvard Corp. revealed that it found two additional examples of “duplicative language without appropriate attribution” [See Harvard, A12]



MARK SCHIEFELBEIN Associated Press

CONSERVATIVES have targeted Harvard President Claudine Gay since her testimony last month.

‘Snow drought’ seen despite storms

Low snowpack levels in Sierra Nevada, western United States raise climate worries.

By Hayley Smith

Although recent storms have thrashed the California coastline and boosted reservoir levels, the downpours have so far failed to deposit significant snowpack in the Sierra Nevada, which experts say is in the grips of a severe, early season “snow drought.”

December’s powerful storms delivered super-sized waves and record-setting rainfall in California, but most of it fell in coastal areas, and almost none in the interior part of the state that is home to the Sierra, said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist with UCLA.

“In some cases there is literally no measurable snow on the ground at all,” Swain said during a briefing Tuesday. “What this means is that right now, as of today, snowpack is at or below all-time record-low numbers for the beginning of January, and I know that’s pretty alarming.”

While there is still time for snowpack conditions to improve, the potential for a meager snow season is worrying. For decades, Californians have depended on the reliable appearance of spring and summer snowmelt to provide nearly a third of the state’s supply of water. Sparse snowpack can also lead to drier, more fire-prone forests.

On Tuesday, state officials conducted their first snow survey of the season at Phillips Station, near South Lake Tahoe, where the ground was a patchy mixture of grass and powder. The monthly surveys in winter and spring are key to forecasting how the state’s resources will be allocated each year.

Snowpack at the location measured 7.5 inches, with a snow water content of 3 inches, said Sean de Guzman, manager of the California Department of Water Resources’ snow surveys and water supply forecasting [See Snow, A12]

Connecting kids, senior neighbors

Wrightwood Elementary School’s Golden Raccoon program aims to keep loneliness at bay. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Ex-Bruin makes NBA look easy

Miami rookie Jaime Jaquez Jr.’s smooth transition can be attributed to 4 seasons at UCLA. **SPORTS, B10**

Top charity givers for 2023

Gift worth \$541.5 million by Warren Buffett is No. 1 on list by the Chronicle of Philanthropy. **BUSINESS, A8**

Weather

Morning rain. L.A. Basin: 64/47. **B6**

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