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6345 Balboa Blvd., Bldg. IV, Suite 285 Encino, CA 91316

1-(866) IRS-PROBLEMS or (818) 774-1813 / www.taxresolution.com

IRS Targets Range From Star Actor to Joe Six-Pack

If you think the Internal Revenue Service only goes after A-List celebrities, a review of recent IRS actions shows just how wrong you are

With celebrity news and gossip shows dominating the Internet and the airways, it's no surprise that actors and various other celebrities in tax trouble receive a lot of attention in the news media.

Just watch Entertainment Tonight or skip over to TMZ.com. The news of tax troubles is easy to find.

There's Hollywood A-Lister and Academy Award winner Nicholas Cage. He owes \$6.6 million to the IRS, according to a tax lien filed against a property the actor owns in Louisiana.

Then there's Darryl Strawberry, a bad boy of Major League Baseball who helped the New York Mets win the 1986 World Series. Now a contestant on Donald Trump's NBC show *Celebrity Apprentice*, the former baseball slugger owes more than \$500,000 to Uncle Sam in unpaid income taxes.

The IRS isn't just interested in living, breathing celebrities with tax debt, either. A deceased one can do just fine.

In October, the Internal Revenue Service filed a tax lien against the estate of Vickie Lynn Marshall in Los Angeles County. Better known as Anna Nicole Smith, Marshall died in Florida in February 2007. The federal government says her estate owes \$125,112.86.

There's a point to this: In my experience, many people believe the IRS goes after a specific group of people. Some believe the myth that IRS only goes after wealthy celebrities. Others believe the myth that the IRS only goes after average folks, the Joe Six-Packs.

You can plainly see the IRS is more than willing to go after big-name celebrities — from Nicholas Cage to Darryl Strawberry to Anna Nicole Smith.

But you can also plainly see the IRS is willing to go after average people, maybe even your neighbor.

There's Blainey J. Nicholas, a 43-year-old doctor in New Orleans who received five years of probation and a \$20,000 fine for failing to file a tax return that reported the \$200,000 he had earned.

Then there's Leonard Widman, a 54-year-old developer from Sherman, Conn. He was sentenced to a year in prison for not paying \$170,000 in taxes.

Even people caught doing one crime can end up finding themselves with tax charges to boot. Take the case of Mary R. Storer, 40, formerly of Wood River, Ill. She was caught embezzling funds from her employer and losing that money at the local casino. Of course, the IRS learned she didn't report that embezzled income and hit her with tax charges as well.

Many myths circulate about the IRS over who gets caught cheating on taxes.

If you've never known a person with tax trouble, you might think to yourself that it couldn't happen to you — that you can't get caught.

From the stories above, however, it should be clear that no matter how famous or how unknown you are, the IRS will eventually catch you if you're cheating.

*Michael Rozbruch is a Certified Tax Resolution Specialist, a member of the American Society of IRS Problem Solvers and a Maryland CPA. You can contact him at 866-477-7762 to obtain a free subscription to his newsletter titled *The IRS Times & Inquirer*.*