

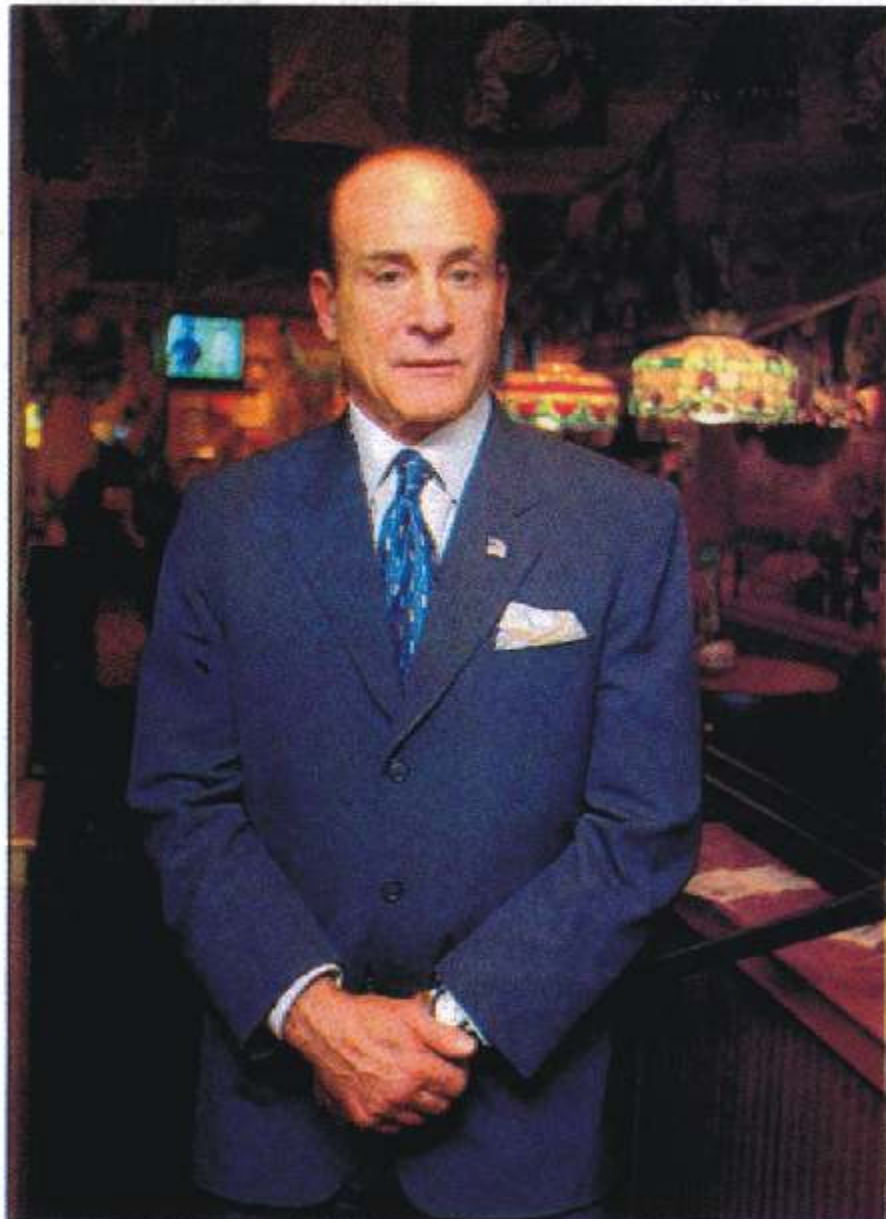


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# Going about the business of Middle East peace



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Apple-Metro Inc. CEO Zane Tankel, whose company owns five restaurants on Staten Island and 24 more throughout New York, got in on the ground floor of the Bridging the Rift Foundation.

Restaurateur is part of group seeking to build joint Jordanian-Israeli research facility

By **BEN EBEN NEWHOUSE**  
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

If you're one of the thousands of people who visit a Staten Island Applebee's or Chevy's Fresh Mex restaurant each week, here's a little tidbit you won't find on the menu: The man who owns the establishment is working to create peace in the Middle East.

Thinking like a businessman, Apple-Metro Inc. CEO Zane Tankel, whose company owns five restaurants on Staten Island and 24 more throughout New York, believes that economic interdependence, rather than politics, will end the decades of strife in the region.

"Politics is too out-front on the world stage," Tankel said. "You have people walking in the cement before it happens. The only way to really have peace is with mutual dependence."

Tankel got in on the ground floor of Bridging the Rift Foundation, a group seeking to build a joint Jordanian-Israeli research facility, after leading a delegation of business leaders to Jordan six years ago.

Already, Tankel has witnessed something no treaty has ever accomplished.

In March 2004, about 30 miles south of the Dead Sea in the Arava Valley, he saw each country donate 150 acres and breach their borders to lay the first stone of a passport-free oasis for Arabs and Jews to study microbes and desert ecology.

While neither Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon nor Jordan's King Abdullah appeared at the ceremony, Tankel celebrated the breakthrough separately with each man.

Bridging the Rift academic director Marcus Feldman of Stanford, whose university, along with Cornell, will act as a conduit for graduate students and faculty, said the facility presents myriad research opportunities.

Among them, Feldman said, studying the genetic makeup of microbes in and around the Dead Sea could yield knowledge of how to grow crops successfully in inhospitable environments.

The fruits of their labor will be divided equally among participating countries, according to Tankel.

"A breakthrough could change the region dramatically," Tankel said. "Right now, you just have Jordanians working for Israeli owners."

The next gap the foundation will have to close, which may yet serve to improve Is-

raeli-Jordanian relations, is determining whose laws will govern the newly created province.

While the facility remains a blueprint, a team of scientists already has conducted a microbial survey of the area, and last month met in Jordan to discuss research plans.

Tankel said scientists from Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon have expressed interest in joining the project, which Feldman hopes will grow to include as many as 1,000 researchers from across the Middle East.

Tankel hopes to get financial support for the facility from global foundations and the World Bank.

Meanwhile, the Manhattan resident busies himself back home with raising money for FDNY safety ropes through the Federal Law Enforcement Foundation, of which he is a board member, and supporting other worthy causes that cross his desk.

And when he finds the time, Tankel said he plans to grow the \$120 million business he started with an Applebee's in the Staten Island Mall into "the greatest restaurant company in the world."

It wouldn't be the first time he accomplished something no one believed possible.

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