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L O S A N G E L E S ■ N E W Y O R K

## Big-time backing for Black Film Festival

By MARY SUTTER

MIAMI — AOL Time Warner chairman and CEO Richard Parsons pledged the conglomerate's backing for the American Black Film Festival "as long as I'm around" at Saturday's awards ceremony.

He declared his support onstage at the Jackie Gleason Theater, where he joined Cedric the Entertainer to present hip-hop impresario Russell Simmons, now chairman and CEO of Rush Communications, with the AOL Time Warner Innovator Award.

That prompted Simmons to remind the audience to keep Parsons in his post.

HBO has sponsored the fest's shorts program since 1998, its second year, and its corporate parent became the main sponsor of the five-day fest this year.

Other honors given out Saturday include the Lincoln Filmmaker Trophy, a peer award voted on by the participating filmmakers, which went to Sacha Parisot's relationship drama "Skin Deep," while pic's Steve White was tapped for actor.

Janice Richardson received actress honors for her turn in Lisa France's urban drama "Anne B. Real," inspired by "The Diary of Anne Frank."

The Blockbuster Audience Award for film — which came with a \$15,000 prize and was also open to films in the fest's showcase — went to helmer-scribe Christine Swanson's romantic comedy "All About You," produced by her husband Michael Swanson. Swanson received the HBO Short Award back in 1998.

The rising star award went to thesp Gabrielle Union ("Bring it On," "Deliver us From Eva"), who will be seen in "Bad Boyz 2."

**AOL TW will sponsor the American Black Film Festival 'as long as I'm around.'**

**AOL TW CEO  
Richard Parsons**



Parsons

This year's HBO Short Award — and its \$20,000 prize — went to Frank Flowers' "Swallow." The festival received 178 submissions for the category.

The HBO team of judges included actors Eriq La Salle, James McDaniel and fest advisory board chairman Robert Townsend, among others.

The premium feevee will air the winning short, said Olivia Smashum, HBO's senior VP of subscriber marketing and business development. Each of the four other finalists receive \$2,000.

This year's fest aimed to increase the market quotient, and fest director Jeff Friday, who heads distributor Film Life, said that 47 companies interested in content were on hand this year.

They included reps from divisions of AOL Time Warner — AOL, New Line Cinema, Warner Bros. Studios, among them — as well as casting execs from broadcasters ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC.

Participants in the convention-like festival ran the gamut from actors and filmmakers seeking a break, to thesp Darrin Dewitt Henson, currently starring in Showtime series "Soul Food," who will make his directorial debut on the feevee later this year with the 30-minute drama "Violation."

Industry vets on hand included actor-producer-director Tim Reid, who screened his "Pygmalion"-like romantic comedy "For Real" in the showcase.

He is now senior executive supervising producer for TV One, the African-American/urban cable net backed by Comcast and Radio One that's skedded to bow in January.

Some 2,000 registered for the fest, which started in 1997 as the Acapulco Black Film Festival and moved to Miami Beach in 2002.