

NATPE BIZ BOUNCES

Feldman praised for confab's comeback

By **ELIZABETH GUIDER**
and **LILY OEI**

LAS VEGAS — The 41st annual NATPE confab wound down in Vegas Tuesday afternoon, with most of the 8,000-odd participants giving it a thumbs-up after three down years and considerable defections on both the domestic and the international fronts.

Business was fairly buoyant, especially Monday on the convention floor and in the adjacent suites at the Venetian Hotel.

NATPE prexy-CEO Rick Feldman was ubiquitous on the exhibition floor during the three-day bazaar, making all-out efforts to keep the mood upbeat and the trains running on time.

"I'd say it's really promising and encouraging," Feldman told *Daily Variety* late Tuesday.

Judging from comments from an assortment of indie distributors and Hollywood heavyweights as well as TV station execs and foreign buyers, the intense three-day trade show met their expectations and then some.

Kevin O'Brien, head of Meredith Broadcasting and a veteran of the syndie biz, applauded the reinvigorated NATPE: "Feldman is a magician. He's brought energy, competence, organization and a positive direction to NATPE. It feels like the old days. But as a senior citizen, I wish some of the studios would move to the floor — or give us roller skates."

"I saw more happy faces than gloomy ones, especially from the station contingent," said Katz TV's head programmer, Bill Carroll, who's a veteran of the syndie confab. "If the biggest complaint is sore feet, you know the show is a success."

As for the international contingent, RTL exec August Rinner summed up a common reaction, saying he was "absolutely surprised" by how good this NATPE was. "I was sure that NATPE was a dying market; instead I saw a lot more people with really interesting things. This has been a year of renewal, better than the last four years. We are not closing any deals here, but have found it very useful to meet

Turn to page 13



POSITIVE VIBES AT NATPE

Continued from page 4

with people to share our plans to fine-tune our discussions for the upcoming AFM."

There was also general approval of the range and quality of the panels organized by NATPE.

Wackiness also returned to NATPE, with a smattering of strangely outfitted characters roaming the convention floor and a casting call for "Cooking's a Drag," which attracted 100-odd bouffant-coiffed big guys in high heels hoping to land the job as hostess.

Major distribs who exhibited on the floor but spent less this year on outfitting their stands — companies like King World, MGM, NBC, Universal and Sony — were generally pleased with the level of activity, though a few thought the noise level was a distraction during private meetings in makeshift screening rooms.

Some buyers still griped that trekking from the Venetian suites to the convention center was an inconvenience they'd like to see eliminated. Fox Intl. TV held court in the Mandalay Bay hotel at the southern end of the Strip, which, given the lines for cabs, became a shlep.

But Twentieth Domestic TV prexy Bob Cook said his suites in the Venetian were packed Sunday and Monday and that it felt like the old days of the bustling syndie biz.

Several domestic syndicators who exhibited in the Venetian suites were seen checking out the convention floor and its accoutrements Tuesday.

The NATPE board will do a post mortem on the confab in a few weeks, and still is considering options for the precise timing and venue for next year. Most likely: Vegas again and slightly later in January.

"We're still evaluating and looking at a whole bunch of things," Feld-

man said. "Nothing is set in stone."

A handful of first-run syndicated hopefuls continued to rack up clearances during the market, though few specifics were announced, and will almost certainly go on air in the fall. They include Paramount's "The Insider," NBC's "The Jane Pauley Show," Disney's "Tony Danza," Universal's "Home Delivery" and Twentieth's "Ambush Makeover."

New reality for 'Fear Factor'

NBC Enterprises saw brisk business, offering up "Jane Pauley," "Starting Over" and "Fear Factor," the first network primetime reality series to be made available off-net. Pauley herself made two appearances at the market, helping to clear San Antonio, Texas; Anchorage, Alaska; and Erie, Pa. Strip now is sold in more than 95% of the country.

Off-net sales of "Fear Factor" were offered to cable and broad-

cast. NBCE senior VP of domestic sales Sean O'Boyle said that while the distrib was talking about all possible scenarios, it was looking at a concurrent cable/broadcast deal.

Other program sellers also had good news to share:

E! Networks has inked deals with broadcasters throughout Asia for more than 1,000 hours of programming from E! and Style. Encore Intl., Liberty Media's Asian arm, picked up more than a dozen titles for its Jiayi block on China Central TV. Greystone TV has pacted with new cabler the America Channel to produce nonfiction programming.

Mexico's TV Azteca did brisk business with two new telenovelas, closing deals in 10 Latin territories for "Sonoras" (Dreamer) and in five territories for "The Heiress."

(John Dempsey, Barbara Scherzer and Eileen Tasca contributed to this report.)