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TELEVISION

TV festival called a success

■ In its first year, the event sparks interest in about 10 pilots by up-and-coming writers.

By Matea Gold, Times Staff Writer

NEW YORK — Despite some technical problems and uneven attendance, organizers of the first New York Television Festival called the five-day event a success, saying it sparked talks between networks and some of the artists whose work was screened.

Of the 25 television pilots shown at the festival, about 10 garnered interest from development executives and talent agents, who contacted the writers and producers of the shows, said Terence Gray, the festival's executive director.

None of the talks has culminated yet in any deals, but Gray said the debut year of the festival, which concluded Sunday night, accomplished its goal of introducing a new generation of artists to the industry.

"If these people have an opportunity to then work at some of these networks, I think that is a real victory, both for the festival and the artists," he said.

Modeled after the Sundance Film Festival and similar events, the television festival aimed to provide a forum for independent television creators outside of the usual network development process.

"It exposed our writing capabilities, our humor and our sensibilities to those industry folks who otherwise wouldn't have seen it," said Bob Wiltfong, co-creator of "The Weatherman Boys." His comedy about two brothers who deliver the local weather forecast in Omaha was screened at the festival.

There were some hiccups in the first year. Early screenings were interrupted by technical glitches. Some of the initial events drew a modest turnout, although organizers said attendance picked up over the weekend and estimated that 5,000 people came out over the course of the festival.

On Monday, organizers announced prizes for the pilots that were deemed best in their category by a jury of industry veterans. "Bitter Sweet," a show about two young advertising executives, was named best drama. Best comedy went to "Artistic License," centered on the antics of a Department of Motor Vehicles' photographer. "Off the Hook," a show about four New York fishermen, was dubbed the best reality program and won the audience award. "El Otro Lado: La Joya," a documentary about a Panamanian prison, won in its category. A show called "The Back Brace," about a teenage boy with scoliosis, was named best animation pilot, while best student pilot went to "University Place," a drama about the lives of New York University students. Winners received \$2,000 in cash from TV Guide.