Curtain going up on
Independent Film Channel

By Rich Brown

How long does it take to launch a new cable network? Four months, according to executives at Rainbow Programming Holdings. The cable programming company last week said it will launch a new cable network, The Independent Film Channel, on Sept. 1.

Helping distribution along will be Rainbow's parent company, Cablevision Systems Corp., which has committed to launch the new network in the 2.5 million homes it serves. Cablevision will roll out the channel as part of its “Spectrum” programming tier which currently is available to half of Cablevision's subscribers and eventually will be on all company systems.

IFC programing will include 30-35 premiere feature-length titles per month, along with documentaries, shorts, animation and original productions featuring behind-the-scenes looks at independent filmmaking. The first of these original productions, to be done in conjunction with the network's University Advisory Board, will be a look at the recent black cinema conference at New York University. The network also will have a Filmmakers Advisory Board, composed of directors Martin Scorsese, Robert Altman, Spike Lee and others.

In preparation for the new network, Rainbow has renewed or extended film agreements with Sony Classics, Fine Line, New Line, Samuel Goldwyn, October Films, Janus, Triton and Castle Hill. Titles on the network will be presented unedited and without commercial interruption.

IFC is the latest addition to a family of Rainbow programing services that includes movie channels Bravo, American Movie Classics and Romance Classics as well as Newsport and News 12 Long Island.

Kathleen Dore, senior vice president and general manager of Bravo, will serve as general manager of the new service.

By David Tobenkin

CBS took the household ratings prize in the first week of the May sweeps, aided by its strong Saturday and Sunday night lineups and the strength of miniseries The Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All.

For the first eight days of the May sweeps through last Thursday night, CBS averaged a 12.3 rating/share, followed by NBC's 11.7/19, ABC's 11.3/19 and Fox's 7.8/13. Widow's Sunday installment of 15.7/24 helped CBS best NBC's network debut of the feature film “Cape Fear” (12.4/21) and a strong showing by ABC's TV movie A Place for Annie (14.8/23).

Widow's second installment on Tuesday (13.8/21), however, could not overcome ABC's usual strength in that night. The 29th Annual Country Music Awards on NBC generated a 13.4/21, dominating the early hours of Tuesday evening.

NBC's hastily made and critically panned Tonya and Nancy: The Inside Story generated a disappointing 10.4/19 on Saturday, a distant second to CBS's Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman (13.7/25) and Walker, Texas Ranger (11.4/21). Fox stalwart The Simpsons showed unusual strength on Thursday with the show's 100th episode (12.4/21) and a special repeat of the show's first episode afterward (12.7/20).