



40TH NAACP IMAGE AWARDS

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RUSSELL SIMMONS TO RECEIVE 2009 NAACP VANGUARD AWARD AT THE 40TH NAACP IMAGE AWARDS

Ceremony Slated to be Broadcast Live Feb. 12 on FOX

LOS ANGELES, CA, Jan. 7, 2009 – *USA Today* named Russell Simmons one of the “Top 25 Most Influential People of the Past 25 Years,” calling him a “hip-hop pioneer” for his groundbreaking vision that has influenced music, fashion, finance, television and film, as well as the face of modern philanthropy. The pioneering businessman, community leader and philanthropist will receive the NAACP Vanguard Award during the 40TH NAACP IMAGE AWARDS, set to be broadcast live from 8-10 p.m. ET (PT tape-delayed) Feb. 12 on FOX.

The NAACP Vanguard Award is presented to a person whose groundbreaking work increases understanding and awareness of racial and social issues. The four previous recipients have been Aretha Franklin, Prince, Stanley Kramer and Steven Spielberg.

“Russell is deserving of this prestigious award because he has used the power of hip-hop to reach and inspire our nation’s youth,” said NAACP Image Awards Chairperson Clayola Brown. “Combined with his ongoing commitment to strengthening relations between ethnic communities and his generous charitable spirit, Russell was a natural choice to receive this honor.”

“Because of his groundbreaking vision, Russell has had a tremendous influence on music, fashion, finance, television and film, as well as the face of modern philanthropy,” noted Vic Bulluck, executive producer of the telecast and executive director of the NAACP Hollywood Bureau.

Simmons commented, “To be recognized by the NAACP during such a monumental year for the organization, telecast and the nation as a whole is quite a tremendous honor and I am very thankful.”

Academy Award-winner Halle Berry and acclaimed screenwriter/producer/director/actor Tyler Perry, both recipients of an NAACP Image Awards, will host the star-studded event which coincides with the NAACP’s 100th Anniversary and kicks off of the organization’s year-long centennial celebration.

Previously announced honorees include Nobel Peace Prize winners, former Vice President Al Gore and Dr. Wangari Maathai, who will both receive the Chairman’s Award.

Simmons has been instrumental in bringing the powerful influence of hip-hop culture to every facet of business and media since its inception. His groundbreaking vision was crystallized with partner Rick Rubin in the creation of the seminal Def Jam Recordings in 1984, launching the cultural revolution known as hip-hop. He has been credited as the most influential mogul in the genre, producing and/or managing such early hip-hop artists as Kurtis Blow, Run-DMC, and the Beastie Boys to signing superstars like Jay-Z, Foxy Brown and Ludacris.

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Simmons also helped bring hip-hop culture to the mainstream with such groundbreaking ventures as Phat Farm, , “The Def Comedy Jam,” “Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry,” “The Nutty Professor,” the Tony Award-winning stage production “Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam on Broadway” and the international hit on MTV, “Run’s House.” He has continued to serve the hip-hop generation through such ventures as the Argyle Culture clothing collection, the RushCard, Run Athletics, Simmons Jewelry Co. and the hip-hop community destination website, Global Grind.

Along with his siblings Danny Simmons and Joseph "Rev Run" Simmons, he founded Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation in 1995. The organization is dedicated to providing disadvantaged urban youth with significant exposure and access to the arts. It also offers exhibition opportunities to underrepresented artists and artists of color.

In 2001, Russell co-founded the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN) with Dr. Benjamin Chavis. Its mission: To utilize hip-hop as a catalyst for youth and community empowerment. HSAN has convened over 70 Summits around the country on such key empowerment topics as education, voting and financial literacy.

In 2007, Simmons co-founded and serves as chairman of the Diamond Empowerment Fund (D.E.F.), whose mission it is to raise money to support education initiatives that develop and empower economically disadvantaged people in African nations where diamonds are a natural resource. Its first beneficiary is the South African free business college Community and Individual Development Association (CIDA City Campus). Since Russell first visited CIDA in the fall of 2006, nearly \$10 million in support as been pledged to CIDA and its educational partners by diamond jewelry-affiliated individuals and companies. Currently, Russell also serves at chairman of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, a non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening relations between ethnic communities. Simmons is the author of the 2008 New York Times Top 5 bestseller *Do You!: 12 Laws to Access the Power in You to Achieve Happiness and Success*.

Event sponsors for the 40th NAACP Image Awards include Chrysler, FedEx, American Airlines, Bank of America, Blockbuster, Ford Motor Company and Southwest Airlines.

Founded on Feb. 12, 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the nation’s oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its half-million adult and youth members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, and monitor equal opportunity in the public and private sectors. For more information on the NAACP IMAGE AWARDS, please visit naacpimageawards.net.

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