

'Blind Side' Leads Slate of Year's Most Uplifting Movies

✖ *The Blind Side* topped the winners at the 18th annual Movieguide Awards this week in Beverly Hills, Calif., taking home the \$100,000 Epiphany Prize for most inspiring movie of 2009.

The film, which also received a best picture Academy Award nomination, stars Sandra Bullock and tells the true story of Michael Oher, a homeless youth who was adopted by a white family in Mississippi and eventually went to college and became a professional football player. It beat out the Arthur Blessitt documentary *The Cross*, Disney's *A Christmas Carol*, *Knowing*, T.D. Jakes' *Not Easily Broken*, *The Soloist*, and Tyler Perry's *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* for the top prize.

Quinton Aaron, the 6-foot-8-inch actor who played "Big Mike" in the blockbuster film, accepted the award Tuesday on behalf of the cast and crew. He said the film's message of faith and triumph over adversity are themes he personally can relate to. And the film is one his church and family can see without hesitation.

"I am a strong believer," Aaron told *Charisma*. "God has my back; He has my blind side. And I want this movie to tell kids across the nation who have dreams or are in a similar situation that they can get out, they are not stuck to that way of life. The role of Big Mike fit me as a human being because I went through some tough things and God brought me out."

Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story received the \$100,000 Epiphany Prize for Most Inspiring TV Program of 2009. Its stars, Cuba Gooding Jr. and Kimberly Elise, also received the

Grace Award for the most inspiring performance in television in 2009.

Actor Albert Hall, who portrayed Bishop Wilkes in *Not Easily Broken*, won the Grace Award for most inspiring performance in a feature film in 2009. Other nominees included Sandra Bullock and Ray McKinnon for *The Blind Side*, Nicholas Cage for *Knowing*, Jim Carrey for *A Christmas Carol*, and Tyler Perry for *I Can Do Bad All by Myself*.

Movieguide sponsors the annual gala to honor Hollywood productions that feature faith and family values. The Camarillo, organization that also reviews movies and hosts a Web site meets with studio executives to encourage them to make more positive and family-friendly movies. The group also compiles an annual report card on how Hollywood is performing.

"Every year gets better," said Ted Baehr, publisher and founder of Movieguide and author of *The Culture-Wise Family*. "It is all God's grace. Last year when 43 percent of the movies in Hollywood had Christian content, I thought we had hit the mountaintop, and this year it is 54 percent. When we see people from studios here talking about Jesus, [it] is a big change."

The Blind Side centers around a Christian family, but Baehr said most of the top-grossing films this year had clear Christian content. "Knowing, Up and Invictus-the press couldn't figure out why these were popular but we figured it out a long time ago," Baehr said. "Create movies for families because that is what people want to see."

The Stoning of Soraya M., about an Iranian woman whose arranged marriage to an abusive tyrant leads to tragedy, tied with *Invictus*, based on events following the election of Nelson Mandela in South Africa, to receive the Faith and Freedom Award for promoting positive American values.

"Forgiveness leads to reconciliation," said *Invictus* producer

Lori McCreary, who attends the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in West Los Angeles. "It doesn't take very big gestures sometimes for people to come toward you. This is what Mandela was genius at."

Other honorees included *Up* as the best film for family audiences and *The Blind Side Bedford: The Town They Left Behind* as the best film for mature audiences. The television film also was awarded the Faith and Freedom Award for promoting positive American values in 2009.

Â Sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation, a \$50,000 Kairos Prize for spiritually uplifting screenplays by beginning screenwriters was awarded to four films: \$25,000 for *The Good Doctor* written by Dwight Carlson and Gregory Carlson, \$15,000 for *The Shoebox* by Sherry Cook, and \$10,000 divided between *Lion of the North* by Johnny Davis and *The Translator*, written by Alan Sproles and co-written by Lizanne Southgate.