

Feverish fans brave boiler-room setting

By Josh Chetwynd

One might think that the heat emanating from the entrance to the Shrine Auditorium was from the warm sun looming large in the clear sky above. But ask any of the fans who showed up to catch a glimpse of the stars attending the 70th Annual Academy Awards and they would tell you: The sizzle was coming from "Titanic" fever, and it was keeping most everyone delirious.

Boston natives Steve Henni-

gan and Tim Baker seemed most afflicted. They wore intricate, 2-foot-long, papier-mâché replicas of the luxury liner on their heads. "Titanic" is the greatest movie ever made," Hennigan said. "We wanted to do all we could to help it break all the Academy records."

Even one veteran star could not avoid it. Comedian Red But- tons, who won the 1957 support- ing actor Oscar for "Sayonara," paid homage to the all-time top- grossing film and male lead Leonardo DiCaprio, saying, "I've

changed my name to Leonardo DiButtons."

Fans in the stands surrounding the red-carpeted entrance were equally smitten by James Cameron's epic romance. In an informal poll, bleacher residents — who had spent some 28 hours waiting for stars to arrive — voted overwhelmingly for "Titanic" for best picture, Kate Winslet for actress and Gloria Stuart for sup- porting actress.

"Titanic" is the only film I've
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paid to see multiple times," said USC sophomore Brian Olver, 20, who said he camped out overnight for a chance to see Winslet. When the actress showed up 20 minutes before the event, the crowd went wild, chanting "Kate, Kate" as she talked over the loudspeaker about her next film, "Hideous Kinky," which she recently finished shooting.

While "Titanic" was the definite favorite among onlookers, the crowd also gave a warm reception to many previous Oscar winners, including Faye Dunaway, Cuba Gooding Jr. and Shelley Winters, who returned to help honor the Oscars' 70th anniversary. Shirley Temple Black, who turns 70 next month, was serenaded with "Happy Birthday."

Sean Connery, who won the 1987 supporting actor Oscar for "The Untouchables," had his own fan club in the stands. Four

girls wearing white shirts with the message "I Love Sean Connery" went wild when the actor showed up; Connery posed for a number of pictures for them.

As expected, protesters used the event as a pulpit for their issues. Most notable was the National Association of Broadcast Employees Technicians, which had 200-300 members protesting the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' decision to choose another union — the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees — to work the ceremony.

But in keeping with the mood of the evening, NABET's protest was peaceful. Union members distributed red balloons with the rallying motto "It's Our Work" to passersby. Many of the 5,000 balloons were seen floating away, nearly missing the half-dozen helicopters and two blimps — one from Russell Stover Candies and the other from "Entertainment Tonight" — on hand.

Many in the stands grouched that conditions leading up to the

ceremony were more than uncom- fortable. "All we got was a biscuit and a single bottle of water all day today, and we didn't get the water until we started chanting 'water, water,'" said Chad Wilkerson, 20, of Lakewood, Calif.

"We were given an agenda that included three meals a day and entertainment," said Sema Holm, 27, from Laguna Beach, Calif. "But we didn't get it. I'm really not sure if it was worth it."

Employees on hand from Pinkerton Private Security, which was responsible for the stands, refused to comment on the condi- tions.

Still keeping in the spirit of "Titanic," Holm good-naturedly likened her experience to that of some passengers on the doomed luxury liner. "Unfortunately, our seats (in the bleachers) were outside the camera's view, so we seemed to get everything last," she said. "It was like we were in steerage and those people who were going to be on camera were in first class." ★

