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OPRAH WINFREY

Fans across the country gather for 'Oprah' viewing parties

May 25, 2011 | By Lisa Respers France, CNN

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For millions of viewers, Oprah Winfrey has been like a friend who has come into their homes five days a week to share their lives.

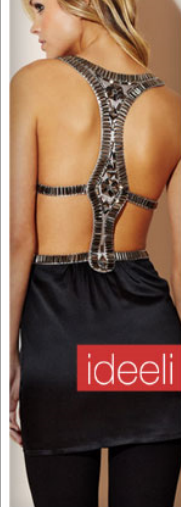
So what better way to mark her last show Wednesday than to gather with good friends and watch the final episode?

"We all, in our own way, have been inspired by Oprah," said Shameeka Ayers, who planned a Southern hospitality viewing party at the Four Seasons Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia, in honor of the final show. "To me she epitomizes the notion that if you can dream it, you can be it. I know that sounds trite, but if you look at her life, you see how true it is," said Ayers who blogs as "The Broke Socialite."



The lead up to the finale of "The Oprah Winfrey Show" included a two day, star-studded event.

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Across the country, fans organized viewing parties to toast Winfrey's last show.

The parties ranged from shindigs put on by local television and radio stations to intimate gatherings of friends.

The room at the Four Seasons Hotel was silent as Winfrey shared her "love letter" with her audience and shared the life lessons she wanted to impart.

There were tears as Oprah made her final walk backstage and high-fived her staff.

"It was everything that I hoped it would be," said Latoicha P. Givens, founder and partner of Phillips Givens LLC, after the show ended. "The final quote I take away is when Oprah said you are responsible for your own life, no matter your circumstances. That's so true."

"I loved it and I thought it was inspiring and motivating without at all being self-congratulatory," said writer Maria Smith who blogs at Mamaliciousmaria.

That ability to impart wisdom and draw people in is part of what has led to Winfrey's astronomical success, said Ron Simon, curator for television and radio at The Paley Center for Media in New York City.

The center planned its own viewing party complete with an open discussion session for fans who wanted to talk about the show. Simon said many fans have expressed a feeling of loss and viewing parties and discussions help to give closure to what has been a strong relationship between the star and her fans.

He said Winfrey has occupied rarefied air in the television industry.

"She is one of a handful of true broadcasters who reach so many different people of different races, nationalities and ages," Simon said. "There are only two people I can think of who had this iconic status and that would be Johnny Carson and Walter Cronkite."

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