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Film Focuses On Effort To Preserve Languages

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HARRISONBURG – A documentary following two linguists' race to record endangered languages will air at 1 p.m. Wednesday at Court Square Theater in downtown Harrisonburg.

The viewing, sponsored by the Rosetta Stone Endangered Language Program, is free to the public and will precede a question-and-answer session with Professor K. David Harrison, one of the linguists the film revolves around. Harrison is director of research for the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages.

"The Linguists," which has yet to be formally released, focuses on Harrison and colleague Gregory Anderson's attempt to document three stages of language extinction in Bolivia, India and Siberia and to address the reasons behind their endangerment.

"It's adventure science," Harrison said of the film. "It takes you around the world and expands a person's ideas of what it means to speak a language."

Rosetta Stone, which started its Endangered Language Program in 2004, has common goals with Harrison and other linguists keen on the language crisis.

"Really our interest is to raise awareness of the issue of endangered languages," said Marion Bittinger, manager of the program. "A movie like this is a great way to get the information out."

Of the world's roughly 7,000 languages, half are expected to be extinct by the 22nd century, said sources involved in the program.

"The rate of extinction of languages is greater than biological extinction," Bittinger said, who added that one language around the world dies every two weeks.

Both the program and the scientists involved in the movie are working to make the world more multilingual, Harrison said.