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# The University of Montana

NEWS RELEASE

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March 15, 1995

## ARAPAHO VERSION OF DISNEY'S "BAMBI" HELPS PRESERVE A LANGUAGE

### MISSOULA --

A new version of the Disney classic "*Bambi*" could help save a Native American language that is on the verge of extinction.

Everything about this remake of the fawn's story is the same as the original with one exception. The characters speak Arapaho.

"Arapaho children born after 1952 did not grow up speaking Arapaho," said the movie's translator, Stephen Greymorning. "And only one person born between 1950 and 1952 is a fluent speaker."

Greymorning, a Southern Arapaho and assistant professor of Native American studies and anthropology at The University of Montana - Missoula, sought to captivate the one audience most likely to revitalize the language, namely Arapaho children.

"I chose *Bambi* over all the other Disney movies because it had themes in it that were relatively comparable to native culture," Greymorning said. "It's not uncommon for many of our stories and myths to have animals speaking."

Greymorning rewrote the tale in his own tongue, rhyming the verse as in the original, and then convinced The Walt Disney Co. to produce the film as a home video.

"We were honored to have been asked by the Arapaho to undertake this project," said Roy Disney, Disney's vice chairman and head of animation. "I believe that Walt Disney and the

-more-

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original *Bambi* animators would be very proud to know that their work is helping to preserve a Native American language."

For the characters' voices, Greymorning coached 30 residents, including 18 children, of the small community of Ethete on Wyoming's Wind River Reservation. Early in 1994, the newly trained actors traveled 180 miles to Jackson Hole to lay down the sound track in three frenetic days of taping.

Greymorning served as language coach, while Disney's technical staff helped the actors use voice tones that reflect the appropriate drama and the personality of the film's characters.

The show premiered in Lander, Wyo. on Nov. 3, after Disney technicians rewired the local theatre so the sound quality would be at its best. Disney provided the Arapaho Nation with 2,000 video cassettes of the film.

Though one movie cannot in itself revitalize a language, spawning an interest among children and, eventually, the tribal business council, could be the first step in preserving a language that will more than likely die out within the next 20 years if something isn't done, Greymorning said.

"Young children will watch animation...and it doesn't matter whether or not they actually understand the language," he said.

Once the seed of interest is planted, other steps can be taken to enhance the children's language development, said Greymorning, who is midstream in translating two more animated films for children. Greymorning has also secured funding from the state of Wyoming for a preschool in which the only language spoken is Arapaho.

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"Our language is fading and, with it, a part of American history," Greymorning said.

"Children are our future and it is vital that they learn about their rich heritage. And language acquisition is a critical component of this."

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