



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PEROT MUSEUM OF NATURE AND SCIENCE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND IN JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, SIGN AGREEMENT FORMALIZING PARTNERSHIP FOR FUTURE COLLABORATIONS, SCIENTIFIC ENDEAVORS AND MORE IN PALEOANTHROPOLOGY

The MOU is part of the Museum's new strategic focus on human origins, with plans to increase research, produce traveling exhibitions, cultivate scientific communication and maximize accessibility around the world while cultivating projects that strengthen international scientific and academic cooperation

DALLAS (Aug. 15, 2018) – Just four months after forming an official alliance with internationally renowned paleoanthropologist Professor Lee Berger, the Perot Museum of Nature and Science has officially partnered with the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa (Wits University). A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed today providing the groundwork for future collaboration including research, exhibits, traveling exhibitions, and various projects in paleoanthropology, humanities and other academic areas.

“As the Perot Museum looks to the future, we want to establish our Museum as a global center of excellence in paleoanthropology,” said Dr. Linda Silver, Eugene McDermott Chief Executive Officer of the Perot Museum. “We are so fortunate to have Wits University, Professor Berger and his team as our partners, and research scientist Dr. Becca Peixotto on board to lead this important initiative. This is a remarkable opportunity to elevate our understanding of humanity and engage our community, not only in North Texas, but around the world.”

The collaboration stems from the Perot Museum's new strategic focus on human origins called the *Center for the Exploration of the Human Journey*. With a mission to explore the human journey, communicate the science of paleoanthropology and stories surrounding humanity, and act as a catalyst for education and dialogue, the Center also focuses on supporting, curating and disseminating the dynamic research developed by Berger and his team of more than 160 scientists working around the world. Berger, who serves as the Center's Distinguished Science Advisor, has rewritten the way early human and hominin evolution is understood with his discovery of a new species of human relative, *Homo naledi*. Peixotto, who was named director of the Center in April, has worked with Berger since 2013 and guided the MOU to fruition.

With the goal of strengthening international scientific and academic cooperation, projects are already in place. These include the newly transformed *Being Human Hall*, specifically the *Becoming Human Wall* featuring casts of *H. naledi* and a virtual reality experience that gives Museum visitors a chance to travel deep into the Rising Star Cave to see where the painstaking excavations take place. The virtual reality experience is offered in English, and, starting this week, is also available in Spanish.

Future projects will include a free app called DinalediVR that is narrated, in their native languages, by six scientists from the international *H. naledi* research team. Three of those are South African languages, contributing to growing efforts to communicate science in local languages and highlighting the contributions of South African scientists on the team. The app, which launches in September, will be Google Cardboard compatible for Android and iOS devices, reducing economic barriers to the VR experience around the world.

“Wits University is excited to collaborate with the Perot Museum, and we look forward to bringing international scientific endeavors to the people of Texas and beyond,” said Professor Adam Habib, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of Wits University. “By sharing research and programming in creative ways, we can maximize our institutions’ capacity to be an international resource. This MOU helps us to strengthen academic and scientific collaboration, so that we can achieve social justice goals, based on our common humanity.”

This fall additional collaborative projects between Wits University and the Perot Museum will be announced, with aims to develop traveling exhibitions, increase outreach in under-served schools around the world and cultivate enhanced communication of paleoanthropology and other social sciences.

NOTE: To obtain the news release, photos and more, please go to perotmuseum.org/press.

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

Becky Mayad, Perot Museum
214-352-1881 work
214-697-7745 cell
becky@mayadpr.com

Schalk Mouton, Wits University
+27 11 717 1017
+28 739 9637
schalk.mouton1@wits.ac.za

About the Perot Museum of Nature and Science. The top cultural attraction in Dallas/Fort Worth and a Michelin Green Guide three-star destination, the Perot Museum of Nature and Science is a nonprofit educational organization located in Victory Park in the heart of Dallas, Texas. With a mission to inspire minds through nature and science, the Perot Museum delivers exciting, engaging and innovative visitor and outreach experiences through its education, exhibition, and research and collections programming for children, students, teachers, families and life-long learners. The 180,000-square-foot facility opened in December 2012 and is now recognized as the symbolic gateway to the Dallas Arts District. Future scientists, mathematicians and engineers will find inspiration and enlightenment through 11 permanent exhibit halls on five floors of public space; a children’s museum; a state-of-the art traveling exhibition hall; and The Hoglund Foundation Theater, a National Geographic Experience. Designed by 2005 Pritzker Architecture Prize Laureate Thom Mayne and his firm Morphosis Architects, the Museum has been lauded for its artistry and sustainability. To learn more, please visit perotmuseum.org.

About the University of the Witwatersrand. *Wits University* is a research-intensive University, one of the leading institutions on the African continent that produces world-class research that is locally relevant and globally competitive. Wits is a global leader in the palaeosciences, one of its key research areas. Wits’ research output has increased by over 45% in the last four years with more than 85% of its research published in international journals. Wits offers a free space for the exchange of ideas and a vibrant intellectual community that fosters debate and knowledge transfer both within and beyond our lecture halls. Wits’ latest research available at www.wits.ac.za/research.